

# THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT

## Reshaping A City



Terence Bendixson

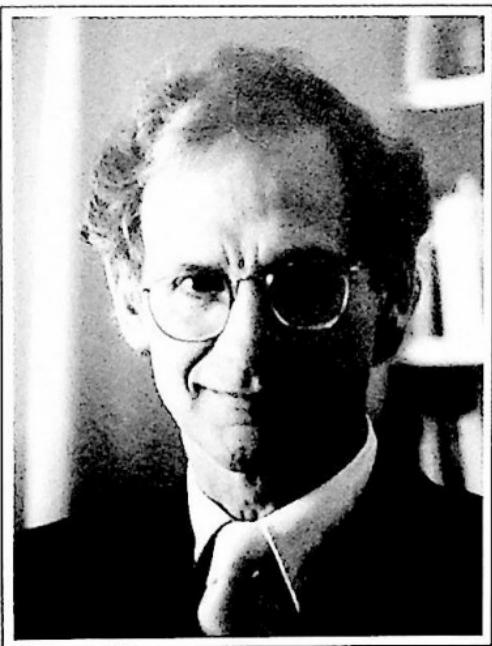
# THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT

During the twenty years up to 1988 the ancient cathedral city of Peterborough was the subject of an experiment unique in the history of modern Britain. For a brief but hectic period it became a new town.

This book tells of those years of transformation and it does so, as far as possible, through the words of men and women who were affected by the changes or who had the job of carrying them out.

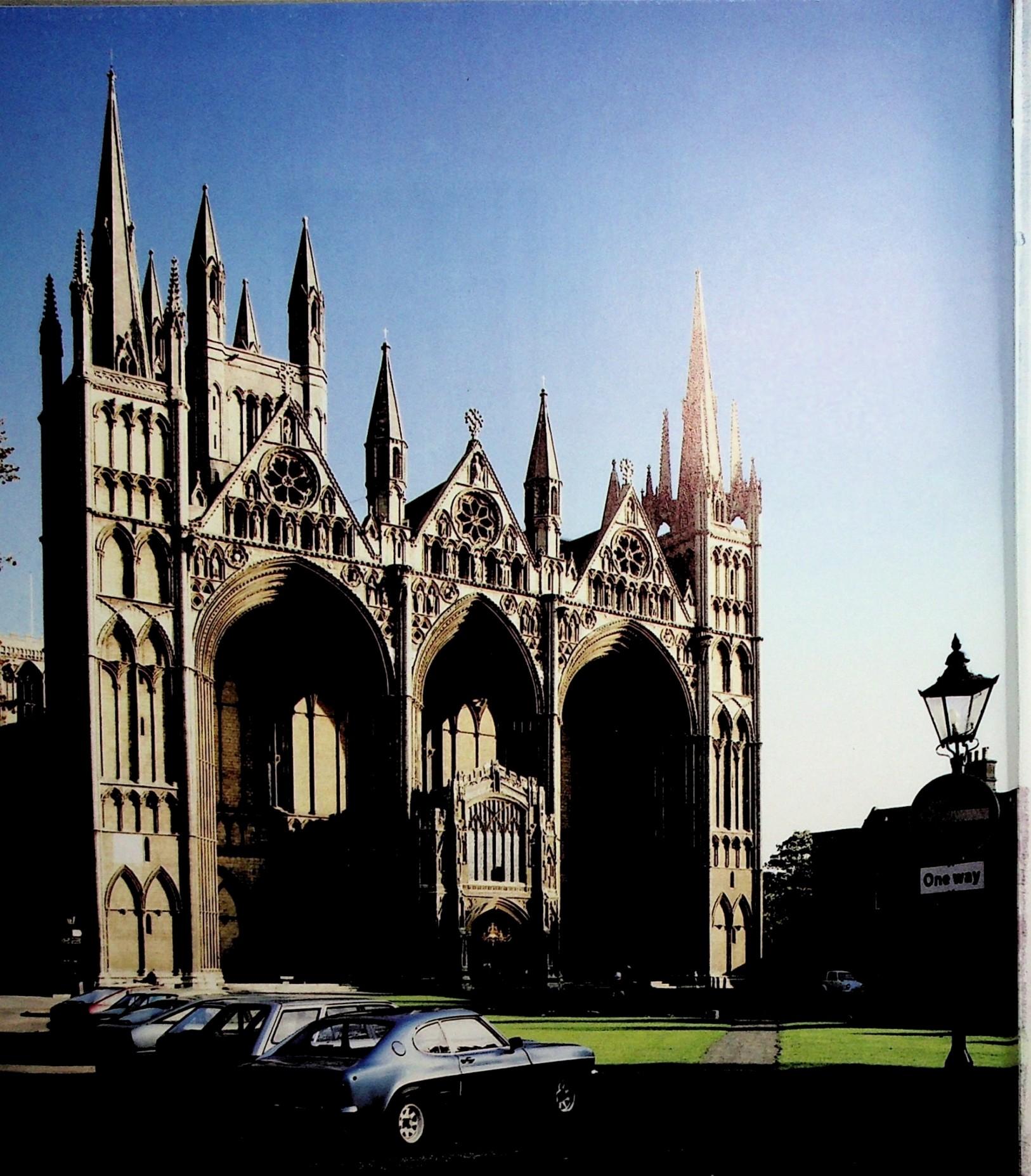
The story starts with the arrival from Islington of Michael and Eileen Mulhern, the first newcomers, and ends with the events flowing from the decision of Jeremy Rowe, chairman of the Peterborough Development Corporation, to go out with a bang. It shows the newcomers settling in – not always with the blessings of the locals – the battle for jobs, the push in the 1970s to build houses for rent and, in the 1980s, the switch to houses for sale. It describes the conditions that led firms like Thomas Cook and Pearl Assurance to move eighty miles out of London.

Above all it shows how Peterborough, while acquiring nearly 60,000 new inhabitants and the handsomest shopping centre in the country, has retained the charm of a cathedral city.



(S. Bendixson)

Terence Bendixson was born in Hertfordshire in 1934. He has lived for most of his life in London but also in Chicago, Los Angeles and Paris. He started his career as a reporter on *The Chicago American*, was planning correspondent on *The Guardian* in the 1960s and was also, for two years, on *The Observer*. In 1971 he joined the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris to work on environmental protection. In the course of this work he was involved in policy analysis in cities as different as Athens, New York, Osaka and Singapore. In 1977 Penguin published his book *Instead of Cars* and in the following year he was elected a councillor in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. His two sons, born in 1963 and 1965, were part of the boom in births that led the government to designate new towns at Milton Keynes, Peterborough and Northampton.



# THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT

**Reshaping A City**

Terence Bendixson

PETERBOROUGH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

*Frontispiece – Peterborough Cathedral: The West Front*  
c.1238

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*The Bishop of Peterborough, the Right Reverend William Westwood, dedicating Peterborough's new Crown and County Courts on 15 May 1987 immediately prior to them being opened by His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester (second from right). Also in attendance: the Honourable Mr Justice Otton, Mr Christopher Chope MP and the Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain, the Right Honourable the Lord Hailsham of Marylebone.*  
(Peterborough Evening Telegraph Ltd)



THE BARNWELL MANOR ESTATE  
PETERBOROUGH

1st August, 1988

### FOREWORD

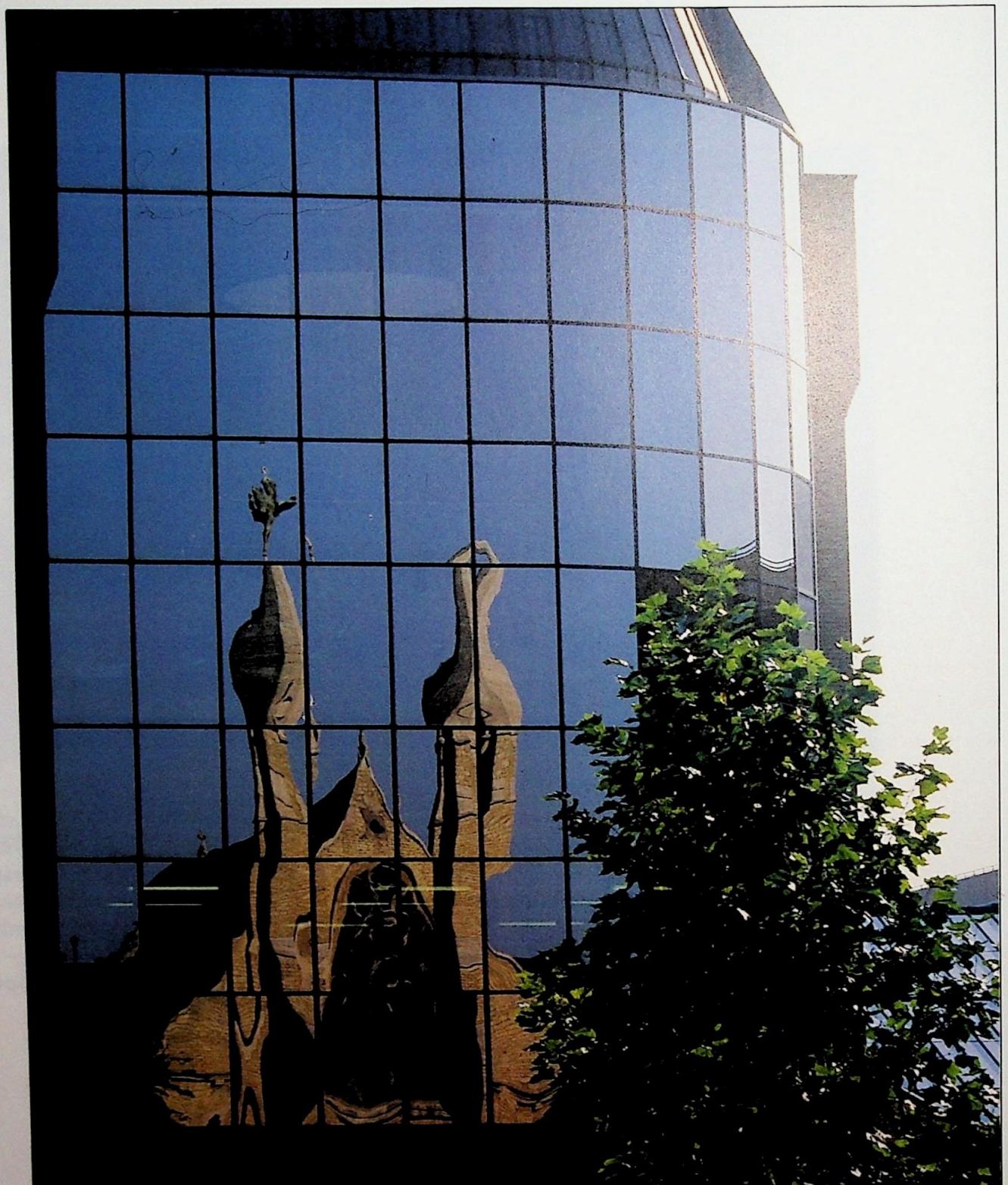
People have been living in Peterborough for centuries. Attracted initially by the fertility of the land, it became for the Romans a strategic fort, for the monks first a Christian outpost and then headquarters for their great estates and the site of their great church, which still dominates the skyline of the city centre.

The coming of the railway ensured its growth in the first half of this century, but it was the political decision to make it a New Town in the early 1970s that did more to alter the face of Peterborough than any other factor.

The Development Corporation was responsible for the planning of the expansion of the old city and this publication marks the course of that responsibility, with its ambitions and uncertainties, giving reasons for all those aspects of life in Peterborough that differentiate it from other New Towns or more traditional but growing urban centres.

It is all too easy to take things for granted, but a little understanding of how things come to be the way they are goes a long way to appreciating what we value in our environment, and the realisation that nothing – not even the best – happens naturally or automatically unless there are individuals who have the capacity to make these things happen. For Peterborough this has meant a large number of different people making decisions that have been of great consequence – their memorial is plain for all to see. This book is a key to its significance. I hope that those who read it find it instructive.

HRH THE DUKE OF GLOUCESTER, GCVO



Peterborough: old and new.

# 1. CATHEDRAL CITY AND NEW TOWN

‘It was lovely. It was everything I wanted – a big kitchen, plenty of room and it was all nice and clean.’

Eileen Mulhern will never forget the day. It was the 12th March 1971. She, her husband Michael and their three children had just moved from London to an ancient cathedral city that was also a new town. The city was Peterborough and the Mulherns were the first family to move there courtesy of the government.

Eileen was worried when she first saw where she and her family were to live. Perhaps that was not surprising. Brookfurlong, the little court of brown brick houses, was plain and modern and set in a cul-de-sac. The houses were also in the midst of a building site.

‘They seemed totally different from what I had expected. They weren’t houses along roads in the traditional way and I thought, “I’m not sure I like these”. There was some greenery but building work was going on all around and the place was mainly bricks and mud.’

Peterborough Development Corporation, the body appointed by the government to build the new town, gave the Mulherns VIP treatment. A car was sent to Ferntower Road in Islington to collect them from their one-bedroom flat, and one of the corporation’s housing officers put them up for the night. Not until the following morning were they taken to see their dream house. There the television cameras and a welcoming party were awaiting them.

Eileen found the town was welcoming too. ‘The people were very friendly. The Peterborians accepted us. They didn’t make us feel uneasy or uncomfortable.’ Michael added that when they went into the shops they were recognised from their picture in the paper.

That day in March 1971 may have been im-

portant for the Mulherns but it was doubly so for the development corporation. Nearly four years had elapsed since Anthony Greenwood, Minister of Housing and Local Government, had laid before Parliament the order designating Peterborough a new town. Nearly nine had passed since W. R. Cox, a ministry official, had visited Peterborough with a double task. He had first explained how the economic boom of the late 1950s, and the baby boom of the early 1960s, threatened to overwhelm south-east England with people. He went on to describe a possible role in catering for this human tide for the ancient city on the edge of the fens.

There was nothing particularly new about new towns by the end of the 1960s. The idea had been revolutionary once, but that was just after the turn of the century when a start was made at Letchworth in Hertfordshire. Even Stevenage,



*The location of Peterborough*



*The market place in Peterborough in the 1960s.  
(Ramon A Kitchin)*

the first new town to be promoted by government, had been begun over twenty years earlier and since then twenty-six planned communities had been dotted about Britain from Glenrothes in Fife to Crawley in Sussex. Not that the Mulherns had any reason to know that. For them Peterborough seemed very remote and Michael remembers feeling like a pioneer staking out a plot in the wild west. In fact he and his family were involved in an exercise in social engineering in which Britain had wide experience and a world reputation.

**W**hat sort of a place was Peterborough then? Michael Mulhern remembered it as 'a one horse town' and no doubt that was how it seemed, but it was also a proud and ancient city boasting the grave of Katherine of Aragon, a company with a world reputation for diesel engines and a flourishing Woolworths. The first families to arrive at Harlow, Stevenage and London's other early new towns had not been so blessed. For them, the welcome wagon had consisted mainly of cows, fields and farms.

It is easy to overplay the importance of a town's history. For most people the past and its relics are at the margins of living. And yet the events of the past do leave their mark on old cities

and in this way influence the lives of the people who live in them. People who live in Peterborough are no exception to this proposition. Events that emerge from even a modest scrutiny of archaeological digs, medieval chronicles and old photographs are still, however subtly, playing a part in shaping their lives.

Although the origins of the present-day city are a Saxon settlement called Medeshamstede, which seems to have come into existence in the seventh century, the Nene valley between Peterborough and Wansford, where the river is crossed by the Great North Road, is peppered with prehistoric sites. The valley floor was also the site of Durobrivae, a Roman fortress which was founded by the advancing legions in about 45 AD. No doubt the Nene was a useful barrier against the unconquered tribes further north.

The size of Durobrivae still astonishes archaeologists. It is thought to have been the largest fortified town of its class and its suburbs sprawled far beyond the forty-four acres within its walls. Then as now, towns flourished only if they had a basis of commerce and industry, and the best evidence suggests that the wealth of Durobrivae was based on pottery. Locally made wares have turned up as far afield as Hadrian's Wall, the Isle of Wight and even Pompeii. Durobrivae appears to have played for Roman Britain the role of Burslem or Hanley a century ago. Export business is thus nothing new to the lower reaches of the Nene valley.

Following the collapse of Roman rule, 'civilisation' moved a few thousand yards down river and by the twelfth century the Saxon town had become a 'vill' called Burch. Hugh Candidus, in a chronicle of that period, noted that Burch was 'built in a fair spot, and a goodly, because on the one side it is rich in fenland, and in goodly waters, and on the other it has abundance of ploughlands and woodlands, with many fertile meads and pastures'.

Already the fertile earth of the Nene valley was contributing to the wealth of St Peter's borough, helping to pay for the great abbey which still dominates the old market streets, and starting a tradition which every July draws farmers from

far and wide to the East of England Agricultural Show.

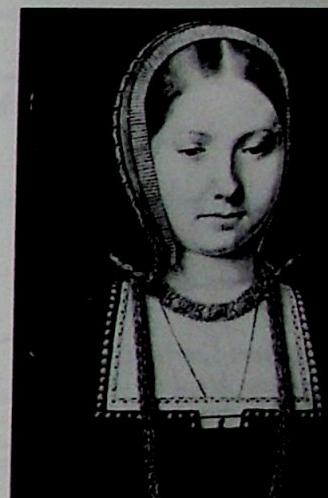
The foundation of the abbey had occurred several centuries before the time of Hugh Candidus although all those earliest buildings, most of which would have been built of wood, were destroyed in a fire which broke out in the monks' bakehouse in 1116. It was quite a blaze and the tower of the Saxon church is said to have burnt for nine days.

The present abbey therefore dates from the time of the Normans who gave the abbots of St. Peter's almost autocratic power (and the duty of providing the king with sixty knights). Abbots of Peterborough were accordingly more often men of political acumen than religious passion, as was demonstrated by John Chambers, the last abbot, at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries. Faced by redundancy, and not wishing to be flung on the monastic dole queue, Abbot Chambers executed a neat ecclesiastical somer-

sault, and became bishop of the see that Henry set up in the place of the monastery. No other head of a religious house equalled this feat of agility.

**H**enry VIII's reign was eventful for Peterborough in other ways. Katherine of Aragon, the King's first wife, died not far away at Kimbolton where today the A45 zig-zags past the gates of the castle. Shortly after Katherine's death her coffin was taken in procession to Peterborough on a wagon drawn by six horses draped to the ground in black cloth. There her body was received by a posse of bishops, carried into the abbey church, placed in a 'burning chapel' lit by 400 candles and finally, after two days of masses, buried at the lowest step of the high altar.

The tomb of 'Good Queen Katherine' subsequently became associated with miraculous healing powers yet its occupant was not the only Queen to be buried at Peterborough. Later in the



Katherine of Aragon.  
(Peterborough Central Library)



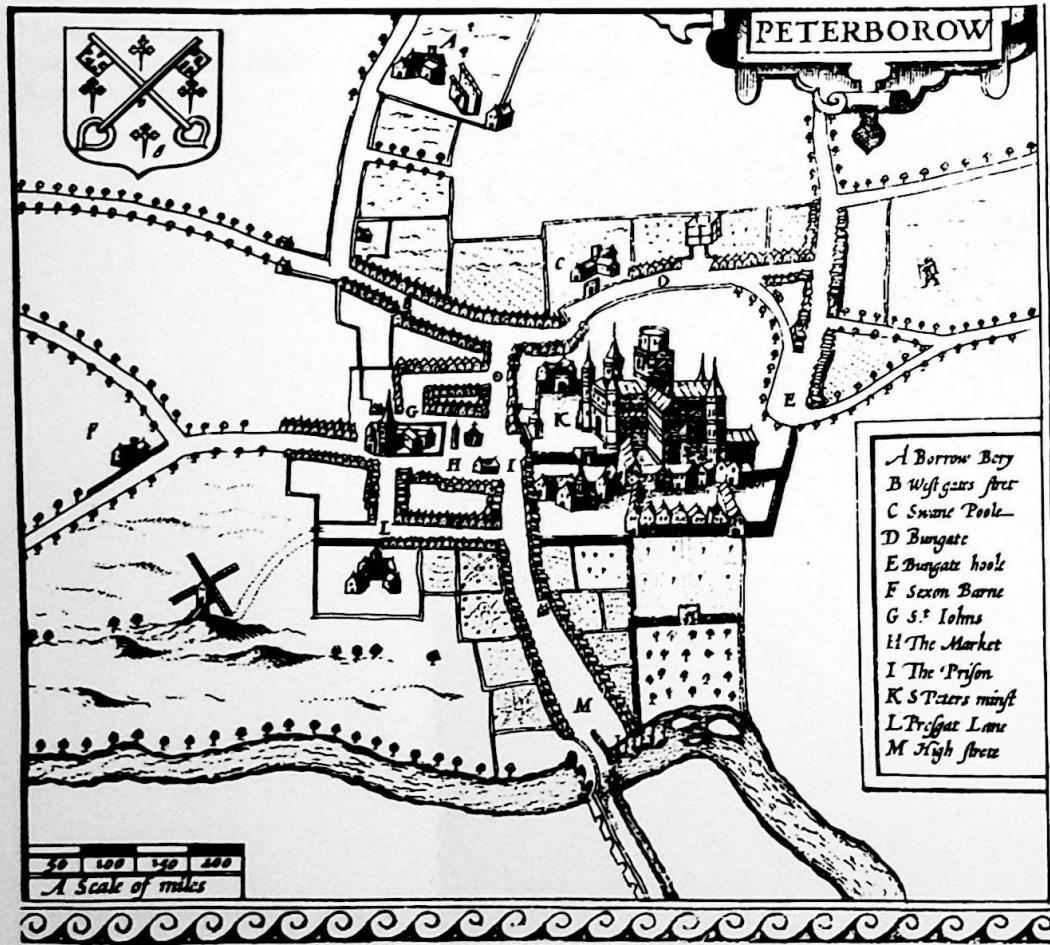
Roman Durobrivae: an artistic impression.

same century, the brave and brilliant Mary Queen of Scots, recently executed at Fotheringhay Castle, was temporarily lowered into a vault in the cathedral's south aisle. Twenty-five years later King James I, her son, had her body removed to Westminster.

The declining years of the Tudor monarchy also tenuously linked Peterborough to the London stage. During much of that period the abbey sexton was Robert Scarlett. As an old man, Scarlett often recalled the escapades of a fenland youth who, after a career as fool at the court of Henry VIII, returned to Peterborough. Sextons' tales are no doubt well-laced with details of unearthed skulls. No doubt too that John Fletcher, son of the Dean, subsequently author of some sixteen plays and co-author with Shakespeare of

*RIGHT: Robert Scarlett, the abbey sexton. He died in 1594 aged 98. (Peterborough Museum Society)*

*Peterborough in the seventeenth century: Speed's map of 1610.*



Henry VIII, spent time in the precincts listening to the loquacious old sexton.

May not the story of the fool and the skulls, regaled in turn perhaps by Fletcher in some alehouse in Southwark, have been picked up by the tape recorder of Shakespeare's memory? And in that case, may he not have played it back when, while working on the grave-digging scene in Hamlet, he wrote: 'Alas! Poor Yorick, I knew him, Horatio; a fellow of infinite jest.' They believe so in Peterborough.

The Roman occupation of the Nene valley, the deaths of two Catholic Queens four hundred years ago, the origin of some lines from Shakespeare – these are not the first things a newcomer discovers in modern Peterborough. And yet no one going for an initial visit to what was the old market-place can fail to get a whiff of history. Go past the arcaded Guildhall, on through the outer gate of the close and there is one of the most extraordinary cathedral fronts in Europe – three arches that rise almost to the full height of the nave. It is an entrance for giants. Telford new town in Shropshire has Abraham Darby's revo-

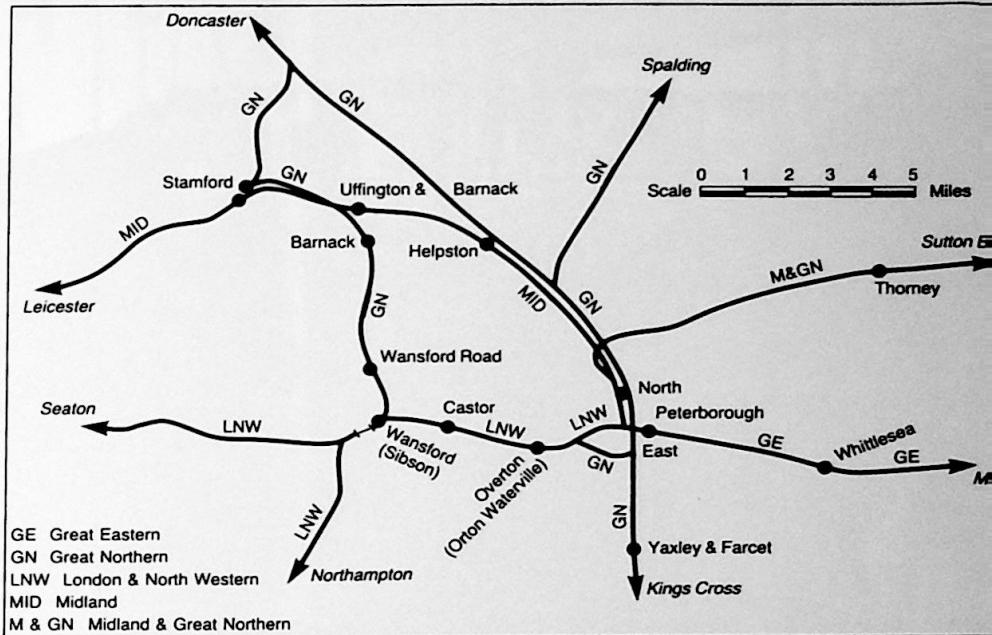
lutionary iron bridge and Washington in County Durham has the birthplace of the family of the first President of the United States. Milton Keynes, more typically, has a few old villages. Peterborough has been the scene of great events for centuries – and they have left their mark.

The city's economic destiny became entwined with London's as early as the eighteenth century. The first link was Smithfield and the appetite of Londoners for poultry. Special wagons, so heavily laden with turkeys and geese that twelve horses were required to pull them, left Peterborough twice a week heading south. They were destined for the great belly of the metropolis. In the nineteenth century these links were immeasurably strengthened when the little market town, its cathedral encircled by a huddle of buttery limestone buildings, became a railway junction and workshop. It also began to grow and to stretch out Edinburghwards beside the tracks of the Great Northern Railway.

The Great Northern began by planning to take its railway well to the west of Peterborough, close to the Great North Road, and on to Stamford. Like the road-builders before them, the railway promoters were afraid of the un-drained fens where it was said a man might sink to his waist in soggy peat if he attempted to walk without boards.

In the event the directors of the Great Northern, with George Hudson's mighty Midland breathing down their necks, went for an alignment by way of Huntingdon, Peterborough and Grantham and awarded Thomas Brassey the contract to drive their iron road up from London. Perhaps they later regretted this choice. Brassey succeeded in crossing the apparently bottomless Holme Fen only after considerable delay. (He was helped by a fenland drainage engineer who advised him to fill the bog with brushwood.) Meanwhile the Midland and two other railways had got to Peterborough first.

The next important event in the history of the town was the discovery of the 'clay that burns' near the village of Fletton, just to the south of the town. It transformed the geography and pro-



duction of brickmaking and broadcast the name of Fletton all over the country. Peterborough-fired bricks soon began to compete with London's locally-made yellow stocks. The conversion of late nineteenth century London from a city of yellow to a city of pink buildings was thus largely Peterborough's work.

But if the rail connection took bricks southwards, it also attracted firms to move northwards. This is born out by the records of Baker Perkins, a firm that fled the high costs and congestion of Inner London just after the turn of the century. The company had been founded by Jacob Perkins, a versatile American who, having failed in 1825 to convince the Admiralty of the effectiveness of his steam machine-gun, devised a way to print the gum on Rowland Hill's 'Penny Black' postage stamps and had a son, Angier, who designed the original boilers for the British Museum. Angier also went into the bread ovens for which the firm now has an international reputation.

The problems faced by the company when it wanted to expand its cramped London works, which were just off the Gray's Inn Road, are described by Augustus Muir in his history of the company: 'No additional premises could be

*Railways in the vicinity of Peterborough in the nineteenth century.*



*The working face of a Fletton brickpit about 1910. (London Brick Company)*

found in the vicinity and Ihlee (the works manager) asked himself whether they should follow the example of other industrial firms that were transferring their factories from London to locations where wages and general expenses were less and where they could expand with more freedom than in the metropolitan area.<sup>1</sup>

Searches were made for suitable sites at Wellington in Shropshire, where the firm had a second works, and then at Bedford and Luton, but all proved fruitless. Eventually ten acres of land were found at Peterborough and bought from the Church for £3,040. 'Although it was a

small agricultural town, it had the advantage of being on a busy railway line and was not too far from raw materials of iron, steel and coke,' Muir wrote. In 1920 Perkins Engineers, as they were by then known, were taken over by Joseph Baker and Sons of Willesden, makers of bread and biscuit baking ovens. This resulted in a further move from London and brought to Peterborough a Quaker firm distinguished for its liberal and humanitarian traditions.

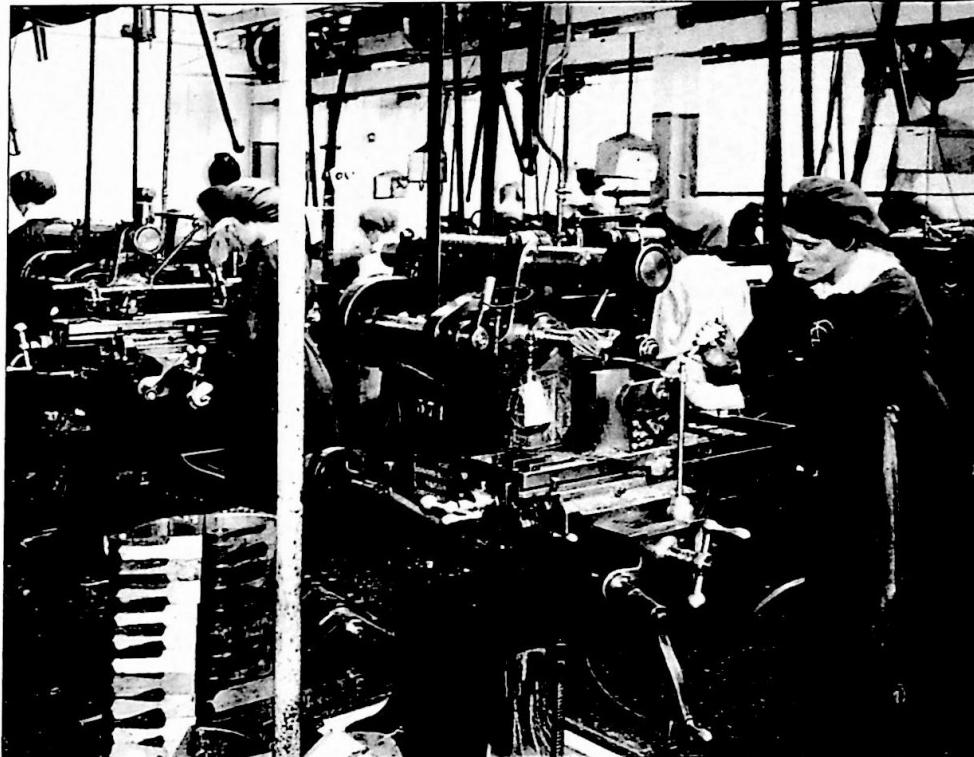
Urban renewal, a phenomenon associated more with the present than with Edwardian England, brought another firm of London engin-

eers to Peterborough. Peter Brotherhood occupied a site on Thames-side just downstream from St. Thomas's Hospital. In 1907 they were forced to move to make way for the mighty headquarters then being built for the London County Council – the predecessor of the Greater London Council.

Peterborough's gradual transformation from a country town based on the cathedral and the corn exchange (one of the busiest in the country at the turn of the century) to a centre of engineering came about through the interplay of economic forces. Firms were pushed to Peterborough by the high costs and congestion of the metropolis. Firms were pulled there by the town's good railway connections and the prospect of cheap labour driven off the land by farm mechanisation. These forces caused Peterborough's population to grow from 17,429 in 1871 to 30,872 in 1901.

By the time that the government's regional planners came to look for sites for a second ring of London new towns in the 1960s the events of the previous hundred years had turned Peterborough into exactly the kind of place they had in mind. They were looking for towns beyond the commuting pull of London but well linked to the metropolis by roads and railways. They were looking for towns with an established base of employment. And they were looking for places with such an array of shops, clinics, clubs, pubs, churches and hospitals as would offer the possibility of a full life to even the first family to arrive from London. At Peterborough they found all those things.

Jeremy Rowe, born and bred in the Soke of Peterborough and later a managing director of the huge London Brick Company, analysed their choice. 'Peterborough was always right. It was



always going to go. It just needed a push. All the advantages were there.'

From the stance of the booming Peterborough of the late 1980s this was a fair assessment. Yet it did not always *seem* like that. When Christopher Higgins (later Sir Christopher) and Wyndham Thomas, first chairman and general manager respectively of the development corporation, were struggling with the aftermath of the 1970s oil crisis, it sometimes felt as if the tall chimneys of Peterscourt, their Victorian headquarters, were about to fall in. New towns are inextricably bound up with the economic fortunes of the governments that create and succour them. The strength and significance of this relationship emerges again and again in this account of the years when Peterborough was a new town.

*The Baker Perkins works at Peterborough c. 1918.*

## 2. THE BACKGROUND

King Edward I, ruler of half France as well as England, established over seventy new towns in Gascony and more than thirty in Britain. Having suppressed the rebellious Welsh and provoked a long and disastrous war with the Scots, Edward needed to consolidate his position. Huge castles were therefore often part of his new towns. Flint, Conway, Caernarfon and Berwick-on-Tweed were all the work of this remarkable town-maker.

King Edward set about building new towns in ways unexpectedly similar to those adopted by Lewis Silkin, the government minister faced by the same task in 1945. Both started by appointing a trusty advisor to chair a working party. Edward's man was Sir Henry le Waleys, Lord Mayor of London, Silkin's was Lord Reith, the dry Scot better known for creating the BBC. And like every newtownsman after him, Edward recognised that the working party needed to have on it people who understood how to create a thriving local economy. He therefore asked the representatives of towns attending his autumn Parliament in 1296 '... to elect men from among your wisest and ablest who know best how to devise, order and array a new town to the greatest profit of Ourselves and of merchants coming to dwell there and of others who happen to reside there'.<sup>2</sup>

King's Lynn is the royal plantation nearest to Peterborough, with the Bishop of Norwich acting as a one-man development corporation. Having got the town under way on the banks of the river Ouse, the bishop found so great a demand for building sites that he promptly had a second town laid out. Was some medieval variant of *The Peterborough Effect* already at work in the fens?

So much for the new towns of the past. What about the past of the modern new towns that flowed from Lewis Silkin's 1946 Act of Parliament? New they may be but underpinning them are a number of ideas of great longstanding – some of them going back almost to the beginnings of European civilisation.

One of these underpinnings is a fear that cities, left to expand freely under their own momentum, will reach a size that is inhuman and even unworkable. Some historians see this anxiety in a proclamation of Queen Elizabeth I restricting development outside the gates of the City of London. Modern expressions of it are the green belts that surround all of England's major, and a number of its lesser, cities, for which new towns act as escape valves.

Another underpinning is a belief that, rather than allow towns to grow up haphazardly, they should be planned. Not that anything such as unplanned development really exists. Even a barriada in Lima or the meanest holiday caravan site in Gwynedd have some kind of order imposed on them – by the squatters themselves or by the farmer who owns the site. Without such order, people would not be able to get in and out and the whole purpose of the shanty town or holiday site would be self-defeating. Nevertheless, when British planners talk about planning they generally refer to the siting and ordering of development by a public authority, an activity that can be traced back at least to the gridding out of Miletus by the Greeks in the seventh century BC.

It so happens that the plan for Miletus is also a stunning reminder that there is nothing new under the sun. It consists of a criss-cross of roads covering a peninsula and is strongly reminiscent

OPPOSITE: Edinburgh's eighteenth century new town: bringing the country into the city. (Hunting Aerofilms)



of Manhattan Island as well as being a precursor of the more loose-knit road network of Milton Keynes.

Sir Christopher Wren's proposals for rebuilding the City of London after the great fire were in the Miletus master plan tradition, but monarchist Wren was not a man to tie a city to the egalitarian geometry of a grid. He wanted to please his King and his plan, with its circuses, obelisks and sunbursts of avenues, was an attempt to reorder London in the style of the then modish baroque—a reminder that professional opinion, like everything else, is capable of being influenced by fashion. As is well known, the good burghers of London rejected Wren's plan. Like Peterborough's shopkeepers, when faced by a development corporation plan that promised to disembowel their city centre, they put a higher value on having their own way than on the latest ideas in town planning.

James Craig's 1768 plan for the extension of Edinburgh, and a whole series of Georgian additions to London beginning with Bedford Square, show how, by the 18th century, it had become customary for the gentry to live in planned neighbourhoods and even planned towns. Bath is a particularly lush example of the art of town planning as it was evolving at that time and it is tempting to argue that the two John Woods, while catering for eighteenth century hypochondria, created a precursor of the new towns of the twentieth century.

The tree-filled squares of Edinburgh and Bath are a pointer to yet another long-established idea that can be seen peeking from the portfolios of modern newtownsmen. This is the English preoccupation with bringing the country into the city. Regent's Park and its ring of mock palaces, that most theatrical of all English exercises in town making, merely shows the scale to which a Royal town planner, loyally served by John Nash, could take an originally modest idea.

**U**ntil the beginning of the 19th century, urban growth was relatively slow and town planning was an expertise largely confined to ordering places where 'the quality' would live.

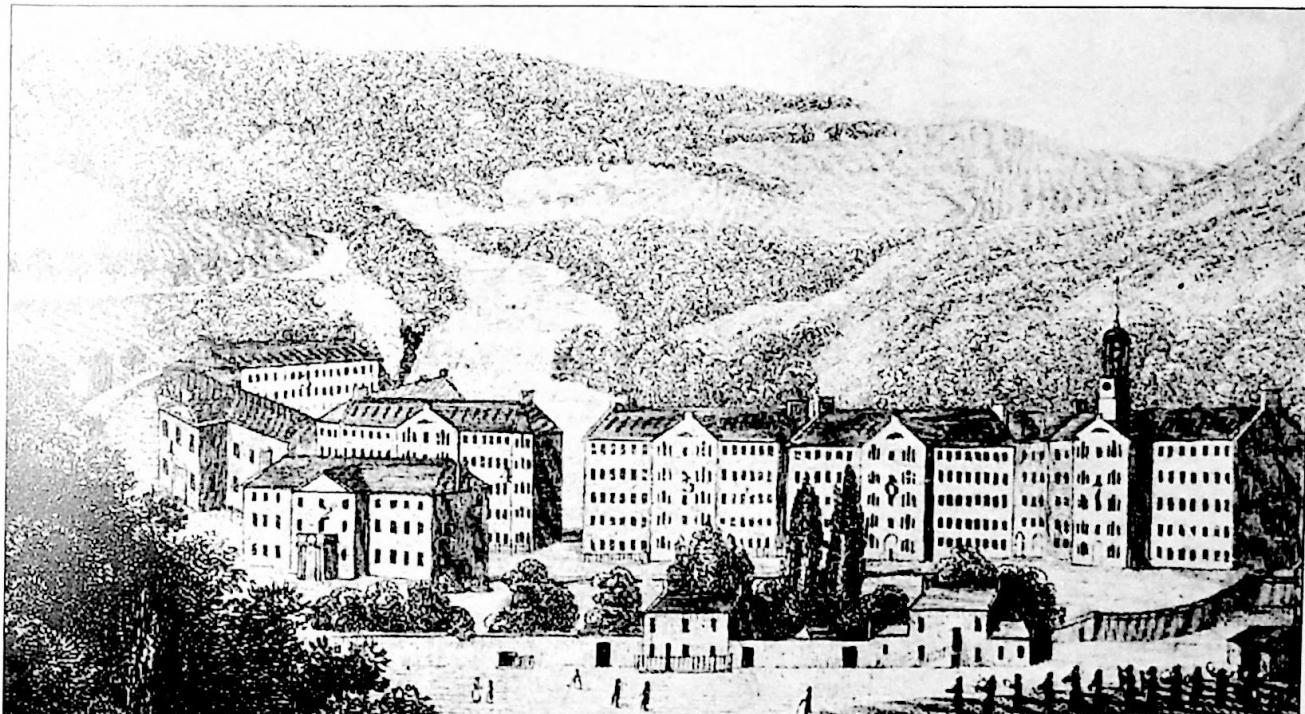
All this began to change following the intellectual and political ferment of the French Revolution. Then, as gusts from the bellows of the Industrial Age began to blow into a bonfire the slow-burning embers of 18th century urban growth, the pace of development increased. Urban problems began to emerge on a new scale as towns grew from nothing to hugeness in the space of a few decades.

For the most part the new industrial towns were compact and dense and everyone walked to work. In cotton towns the few who owned property often occupied half of the land. 'Working people lived where factories, roads, canals and, later, railways allowed them to. The results were squalid—nineteenth-century towns smoked and stank . . .'<sup>3</sup>

One of the first people to try and ameliorate the bestial conditions found in the new mill towns was the utopian socialist and nonconformist Robert Owen. He set out to create a better kind of town for the denizens of the piggeries of Clydeside. He also wanted to improve the entire human condition: 'A new era must commence; the human intellect, through the whole extent of the earth, hitherto enveloped by the grossest ignorance and superstition, must begin to be released from its state of darkness . . .', Owen proclaimed in 1816 at the launch of his pioneering industrial community at New Lanark.

The New Lanark experiment consisted of a school and club attached to a gaunt woollen mill built by Owen's father-in-law on the banks of the upper Clyde. Later in the century other liberal entrepreneurs such as Sir Titus Salt, the Cadburys and the Lever brothers created other model settlements at Saltaire near Bradford, Bourneville and the optimistically named Port Sunlight.

Robert Owen and the philanthropic, humanitarian, idealistic or self-interested imitators who came after him, invariably chose sites on the edges of cities for their utopias. Octavia Hill, who was born at Wisbech only twenty miles to the east of Peterborough, was the first to focus single-mindedly on the industrial slums that lay within most Victorian cities. She was a householder not a town-maker and she made a start by persuading



*Robert Owen's planned factory community at New Lanark. The mills built by Owen's father-in-law in the 1780s are the main five-storey buildings. In the left foreground is the school (1817); beyond that is the institute (1816) and community centre, both built by Owen.* (BBC Hulton Picture Library)

her friend John Ruskin to buy three cottages for her in Marylebone in London. She let them on the condition that, if the tenants would regularly pay their rents, she would keep the property in good repair. She was not interested in profit.

The Marylebone experiment led to a proliferation of model housing schemes, to the housing association movement and, in the aftermath of the first world war, to what came to be known as council houses. Rented houses built by new town development corporations are in line of direct descent from those carefully-managed cottages in Marylebone.

Octavia Hill's concerns did not end with the improvement of housing. She also had a keen sense of the importance of greening cities and in 1875 she set up a society to promote the planting of trees and the establishment of gardens in cities. Later she raised £70,000 to rescue Parliament Hill Fields in Hampstead from the predatory claws of the house-builders.

Peterborough was itself not untouched by the rays of idealism that regularly penetrated the

gloom of the 19th century industrial city. Just before the turn of the present century Arthur Itter, the owner of the New Fletton Brickyard at King's Dyke, promoted the building of nearly one hundred houses for his employees and a private school costing £1,000. At the opening of the school in July 1904, *The Peterborough Standard* reported that Itter appealed '... for the children to be sent regularly and clean, (and) said it was not sufficient to teach them the three R's, they must also be taught at home the three M's, morality, method and manliness, and in addition they should be brought up in the knowledge of God'.

Richard Hillier, the historian of London Brick Company, notes that King's Dyke also had a brass band and, in 1899, an 'ambulance class' that was 'probably one of the earliest voluntary expressions of concern about safety in the brickyards'.<sup>4</sup>

In the terminal years of the 19th century all these separate ideas about limiting the spread of metropolis, planning development, creating



*Brickworkers outside Bray & Co's Fletton kilns in 1902.  
(London Brick Company)*

good conditions for living and for greening cities were brilliantly pulled together in a book originally called *Tomorrow, a peaceful path to real reform*, but republished in 1902 as *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*.<sup>5</sup> Its author was Ebenezer Howard.

Howard saw garden cities as an alternative to the pig-piling and alienation of metropolis and, more surprisingly, as a way of compensating for the shortcomings of country life. They promised

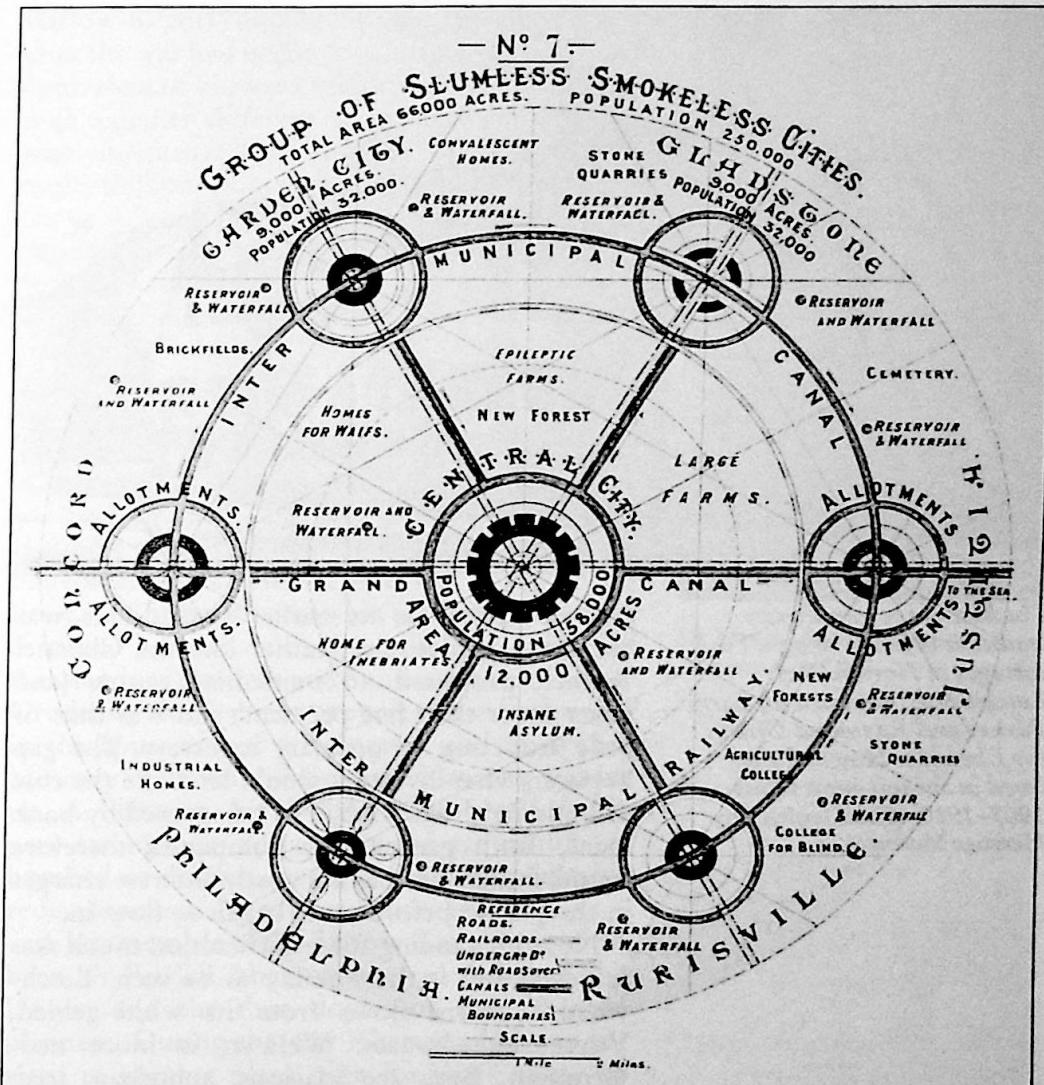
to combine the social advantages of the city and the healthiness of the country. I have always thought that the model for them must be the strawberry plant which, once it has established itself in one place, throws out an organic highway and starts a new plant ten or twelve inches away. So it was with Howard's garden city. Once the population of a nucleus settlement reached 32,000 people, Howard envisaged that a canal or

railway would be pushed out across the nearby country – the green belt – to a nascent twin town and that this process would be repeated as often as population growth required it. Howard called this strawberry plant clustering of towns with 32,000 inhabitants ‘Social City’.

The open farmland that spread out between the hub and satellites of a social city was no less important than the towns themselves. This was social city’s bread basket and within it Howard, social hygienist that he was, located ‘epileptic farms’ and ‘homes for waifs’ as well as conventional farms and reservoirs. In a book published in 1969 Francoise Choay described the garden city as ‘one of the last and most influential utopian models to come out of the nineteenth century’.<sup>6</sup> One place where this influence was to be felt was Peterborough. Signs of it may be detected in the way that Tom Hancock, the master planner of the new town, chose to meld new development on to the ancient city.

F. J. (later Sir Frederic) Osborn, who took over from Howard after the pioneer had died, wrote that *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* was worth reading ‘for its easy and charming style’ and for ‘its blending of benevolent idealism and basic commonsense’.<sup>7</sup> Lewis Mumford, a distinguished American commentator on urban affairs and a wittier writer than Osborn, thought that *Garden Cities* was earnest and pedestrian but he had no quarrel with the proposition that Howard was a man of commonsense. ‘...the modern New Town is a... distinctly British invention – exactly the sort of sensible innovation one might expect from a robust little man with red cheeks and a walrus moustache who spent a good part of his life and modest income on improving the typewriter and inventing a stenotype machine.’<sup>8</sup>

Within a few years of the publication of his seminal book Howard used his remarkable powers of persuasion to assemble a group of practical idealists and launch First Garden City Limited. The authorised capital of the company was £300,000 and the outcome was Letchworth Garden City in Hertfordshire, thirty-five miles from London on the Great North Road. Progress



was slow at Letchworth and the town, like Milton Keynes at a later date, while loyally supported by its inhabitants, was regularly attacked in the Press.

Perhaps because Letchworth grew slowly Howard impatiently decided, this time with a younger group of associates, to promote a second garden city. The site was only twenty miles from King’s Cross and Howard was in such a rush to buy the first part of it that he had no time to borrow the £5,000 deposit from friends.

Welwyn, which dates from 1919, grew faster than Letchworth but was bedevilled by the same

Ebenezer Howard’s ‘Social City’, from *Tomorrow, a peaceful path to real reform*, 1898.



*The best of the garden city tradition in house design. Four cottages in Norton Way, Letchworth, designed by Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin for Ebenezer Howard who lived in the left-most house 1905–1910. (First Garden City Heritage Museum)*

lack of capital as its earlier sister. This was because a garden city, rather like the Channel Tunnel, promised no immediate return (and never more than five per cent) and was thus of little attraction to ordinary investors. The gap between what investors would lend and the cost of building the town had to be covered by bank loans. Both garden city companies therefore found themselves paying costly interest charges in the period before rents began to flow in.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, much was achieved and is there today to be seen. Letchworth's charm flows from its white-gabled, Voysey-like houses. Welwyn is more neo-Georgian. Both are spacious, suburban, tree-sprinkled and unmistakably English. What cannot be seen is the vital principle of land-ownership which underlay both of them. It was *leasehold* as in Belgravia and the other parts of London developed by landed families. The garden city companies sold land on long leases, retained the freeholds, charged ground rents and, after paying their five per cent dividends, devoted the remainder of their rental income to the betterment of their towns. The more the town flourished the more therefore there was to spend on parks, community centres, sports clubs and theatres. It was a principle that was to re-emerge in the post-1945 new towns.

Lewis Mumford described Howard as 'a benign Englishman unfettered by those forms of specialised competence that paralyse creative thought'. Howard was also remarkably effective in putting his ideas into action. Yet, for one reason or another, the idea of using garden cities to manage the growth of London, or anywhere else, won few friends.

The Garden City Association, founded by Howard in 1899 (it subsequently renamed itself the Town and Country Planning Association), lobbied away but Westminster paid little attention. F.J. Osborn drew attention to one possible explanation. 'Almost contemporaneously with Howard's book, the development of electric traction and the internal combustion engine began to revolutionise urban transportation, and it became practicable for city dwellers to obtain, without a serious increase in travel time, acceptable dwellings in suburbs.'

Peterborough was, in a way, involved in this transport revolution. Henry Royce, who was born in the nearby village of Alwalton, and served a brief apprenticeship in the engineering shops of the Great Northern Railway, went on to build, with Henry Rolls, passenger cars which did more than most to contribute to the mystique of automobility.

If the coming of the car and the tram diverted attention from Howard's idea, the Great War, the drive to create a country fit for heroes, and the depression obscured it further. Henrietta Barnett's handsome and fashionable Hampstead Garden Suburb added an element of confusion. What *was* the difference between garden cities and garden suburbs? Surely both were about spacious houses in green settings? In the mix-up many failed to perceive the all-important potential of garden cities to help contain urban sprawl.

Meanwhile London was growing. Between 1921 and 1939 the population of the metropolis grew by 1.2 million and the tentacles of Frank Pick's bright red Underground snaked

out across the green fields of Middlesex. The housebuilders got to work. Beside them, ribboning along the first dual carriageways, came the new light industries with their Crittall windows and, occasionally, a wonderful jazzy art-deco facade. It was the age of Bakelite, the Hoover and the wireless – the dawn of consumerism.

In some parts of the country it did not seem like the dawn of anything; more the twilight of the Industrial Revolution. Gloom and unemployment hung about much of the once prosperous realm of King Cotton. It was the same in the coal valleys and along those riverbanks which once had rung with the clang of ship-building. Successive governments set up successive inquiries. The first was the Committee on Unhealthy Areas, chaired by a future prime minister, Neville Chamberlain. It reported in 1920 and recommended, among other things, restricting the growth of industry in London.

The distribution of industry question and, in particular, the plight of the 'North', dominated discussion about the future of the cities throughout the thirties. 'Special Areas' were designated, the first of a long line of actions designed to resuscitate regions where cotton and coal had ceased to generate wealth. Meanwhile London continued its phenomenal growth and the Greater London Regional Planning Committee, advised by Sir Raymond Unwin, gave for the first time official blessing to the idea of using new towns to manage the growth of great metropolitan areas.

In its second report in 1933 the committee became more specific and put forward a plan for a 'green girdle' of protected country around London and a complementary ring of new towns. For a period nothing more was heard of the towns but Unwin's girdle caught the imagination of the counties of London and Middlesex. Parliament passed a London Green Belt Act and the two counties began buying tracts of open country in accordance with Unwin's guidelines.

In 1938 Neville Chamberlain, by then Prime Minister, set up a Royal Commission on the Geographical Distribution of the Industrial Population. The commission's report (the

Barlow Report) unpropitiously published a year after the war had begun, can be seen as the official equivalent of Howard's famous book. It began to pull together different strands of thinking and was unequivocal about the disadvantages of multi-million cities like London. It was hazier about solutions although within its pages could be seen the dim outlines of a policy for a central authority to deal with the redevelopment of congested inner cities and the dispersal of both people and jobs.

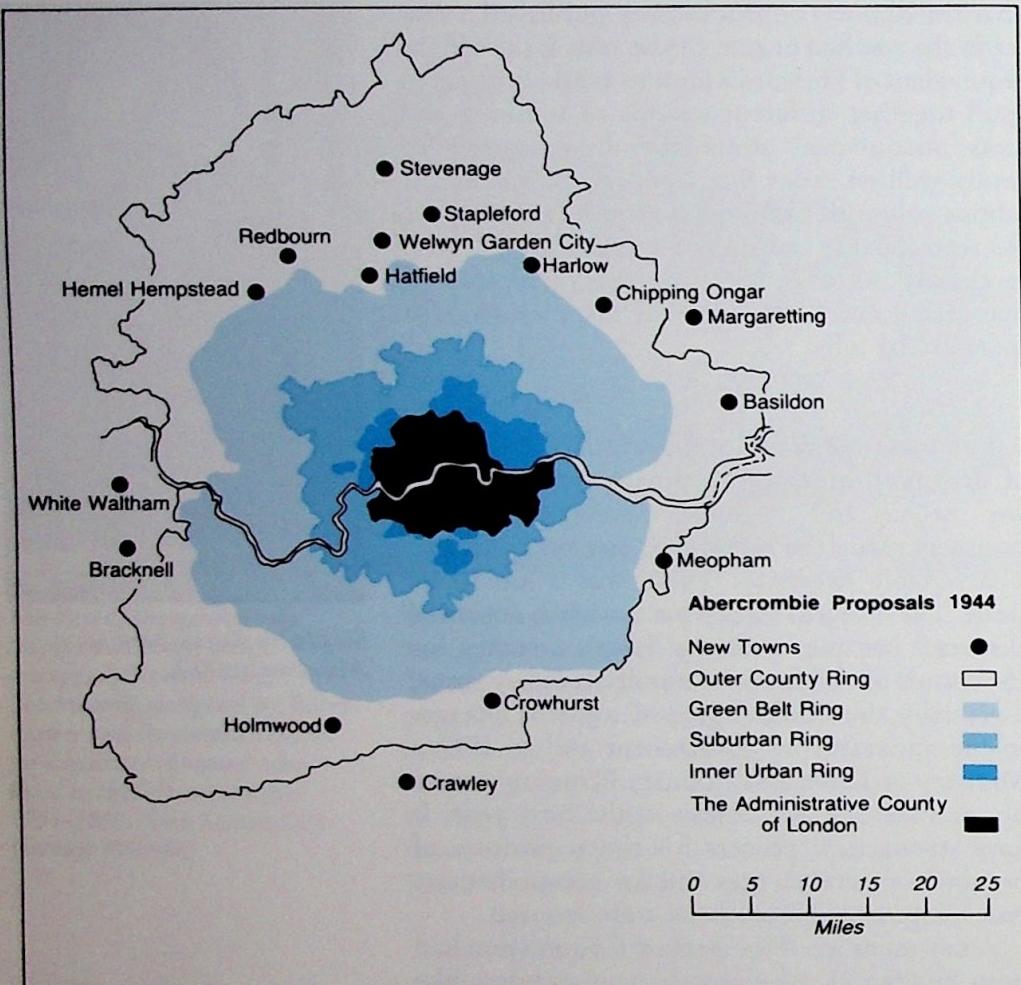
**A**s in so many other fields, the war and the spirit it unleashed created new enthusiasm for urban and regional planning. Hitler's bombers made the renewal of Britain's cities an unavoidable necessity. There was a job to be done. The hitherto somewhat academic notion of dispersal became, with the 'blitz', a reality for thousands of children and hundreds of key firms. Gradually the Cabinet groped towards changes in the apparatus of government and in 1943 a Ministry of Town and Country Planning was set up. A Planning Act followed the next year. It gave strong new powers for the acquisition of bombed or derelict sites and for comprehensive redevelopment. New towns were ignored.

A key member of the Barlow Commission had been Sir Patrick Abercrombie, an architect like Unwin and the then doyen of British town planners. During the war Abercrombie was invited to prepare plans, first for the County of London and then for Greater London. The latter, published in 1944, developed the thinking of Unwin and advocated a 'green belt ring' around the metropolis with, beyond it, a cluster of new towns. Abercrombie also clarified the inter-dependent roles of restrictive green belts and permissive new towns in shaping a dynamic city.

Abercrombie's ten new town sites were all between twenty and thirty miles from Charing Cross and, in keeping with the thinking of Ebenezer Howard, had their own local green belts. They were part of a strategy for dispersing an 'overspill' of 600,000 people from inner London and 415,000 from the rest of the metro-



Sir Henry Royce, born at Alwalton in 1863.



Sir Patrick Abercrombie's 1944  
County of London Plan  
proposals and London's first  
ring of post-war satellite towns.

polis. The capacity of the new towns was set at half a million souls.

Abercrombie was a humane and idealistic man but underlying his overspill calculations were assumptions of ominous portent. Abercrombie wanted to rebuild London's obsolete parts in a spacious way, but he was obliged to accept that 200 persons to the acre should be housed on sites in the central area and that throughout much of the old County of London the ratio should be 136 persons per acre.

These densities, allied to other standards for open space, were, together with industrialised building, to drive the engine of high-rise building in the 1960s. The *ville radieuse* of Le Corbusier, with its phalanxes of towering apartment houses,

provided the imagery. The Town and County Planning Association, always quick to sniff out overcrowding, at once signalled its concern about Abercrombie's densities. It was of no avail. The rebuilding of a more traditional London based on houses with gardens accommodating about 100 persons per acre of residential land was deemed impossible. Perhaps one hindrance was the standard for parks. Whatever the reason, such a reduction in densities would have made it necessary to transport at least another 200,000 people from the inner boroughs to the Home Counties. The political will to do this did not exist. Given the loss of rateable value likely to result from any dispersal, it was still far from clear that any new towns would be built.

The war ended. The people of Britain gave for the first time in their history a Parliamentary majority to the Labour party. It was a landslide victory with the new government having a majority of 146 seats. 'Poor Mr Churchill, I suppose he will be shot', an old lady in Zagreb wrote to Sir William Deakin.

In no time at all, and despite other pressing needs, Lewis (later Lord) Silkin, to whom Prime Minister Attlee gave the Town and Country Planning portfolio, was offered Parliamentary time. He seized the opportunity and, like Edward I before him, first appointed an advisory committee. Its role was to turn theory, and the uncertain histories of Letchworth and Welwyn, into a basis for legislation. Lord Reith was chairman and drove his colleagues hard. Within nine months they had come up with practical proposals about how to finance new towns, how to manage them and how to ensure they did the job of relieving overcrowding in their related cities. By November 1946 the New Towns Act was on the statute book.

Wyndham Thomas, who worked with F. J. Osborn at the Town and Country Planning Association, saw Osborn as the key member of Reith's committee. 'He was the only one who had had a direct involvement in the building of Letchworth and Welwyn. Not only was he a

tremendous advocate of what to do but, like Howard, he had worked out how to do it.

'Osborn was a practical visionary and there are very, very few of those around. Lots of people have ideas and will tell you what to do, but the precious people are those who will work out how to do it. I have always felt that Frederic Osborn was more influential than Howard. I believe his influence was responsible for the new towns programme.'

The immediate result of the Act was fourteen new towns of which eight were intended to house Londoners. Silkin was so keen to get ahead that he tried to promote Stevenage before the new powers were available. Frank Schaffer was present when the government's proposals were explained to those who were to be affected. Silkin was greeted by cries of 'Gestapo' and 'Dictator'. 'The tyres of his car were let down and sand put in the petrol tank. The name boards on the railway station were replaced with ones marked "Silkingrad".'<sup>9</sup> It was not to be the last time that new towns were vilified.

Notwithstanding this frosty beginning, the first generation of new towns was pushed ahead throughout the late forties and the fifties under both Labour and Conservative governments. But for all the efforts of the Town and Country Planning Association to have the number of towns increased only Cumbernauld, near Glasgow, was added to the original fourteen. The honeymoon was over. It was partly that, in the early years, a need to 'export or die', and a resulting shortage of building materials, had made progress slower than hoped for. It was partly too that new towns, with their 'green wedges' and suburban layouts, were thought to be wasteful of land. This was still an emotive (if exaggerated) issue for a country that had been urged to 'dig for Victory', and even put Hyde Park to the plough.

The writer Ian Nairn, in one of the sporadic bouts of guerilla warfare that break out between the architects and town planners, led the attack for the former. As Hazlitt said of Cobbett, he wrote in 'plain, broad, downright English'. The



*New towns promoted under the New Towns Act 1946.*

wide-open housing layouts characteristic of the 1950s he lampooned as 'subtopia'. It was an effective campaign and when Hugh (later Sir Hugh) Wilson came to design Cumbernauld he gave it a large ration of that 'urbanity' – tight-packed buildings laced by alleyways – advocated by the architects. Cumbernauld was, as a result, built at a density uniquely high for a new town.

The Conservative government which took office in 1951 was committed to reducing bureaucracy, stopping all further nationalisation



*'Subtopia', or Stevenage in the 1950s.* (Ken Lambert, Camera Press London)

and overhauling the town planning system. It was not keen on new towns. Harold Macmillan at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government nevertheless became a closet supporter of those that existed. Their potential to contribute to his target of 300,000 houses a year was too valuable to sacrifice on the altar of Conservative ideology.

Town development by local authorities was the obvious alternative to new towns sponsored by Westminster. Macmillan lost no time in getting support for this proposition using to do so a paper prepared by Hugh Dalton, his Labour predecessor. The Town Development Act 1952 followed. It empowered over-populated cities to export people to willing country towns. The Act was designed too to answer the criticism that the new towns, with their policy of homes-for-those-with-jobs, were not rehousing people from the worst inner city slums. London and Birmingham both grasped at the new powers. What was subsequently achieved at Basingstoke in Hamp-

shire and Swindon in Wiltshire showed that, given a dynamic receiving authority, they could be effective.

Peterborough City Council took a look at a scheme of this kind in the mid-50s. The town clerks' old boy network was the start of it. Peter Clarke, town clerk of Peterborough at the time, was contacted by the county clerk at Middlesex. 'He rang up and said, "We're looking around", and that it would be great fun to work with me.' Both had earlier been in the town clerk's office at Leicester.

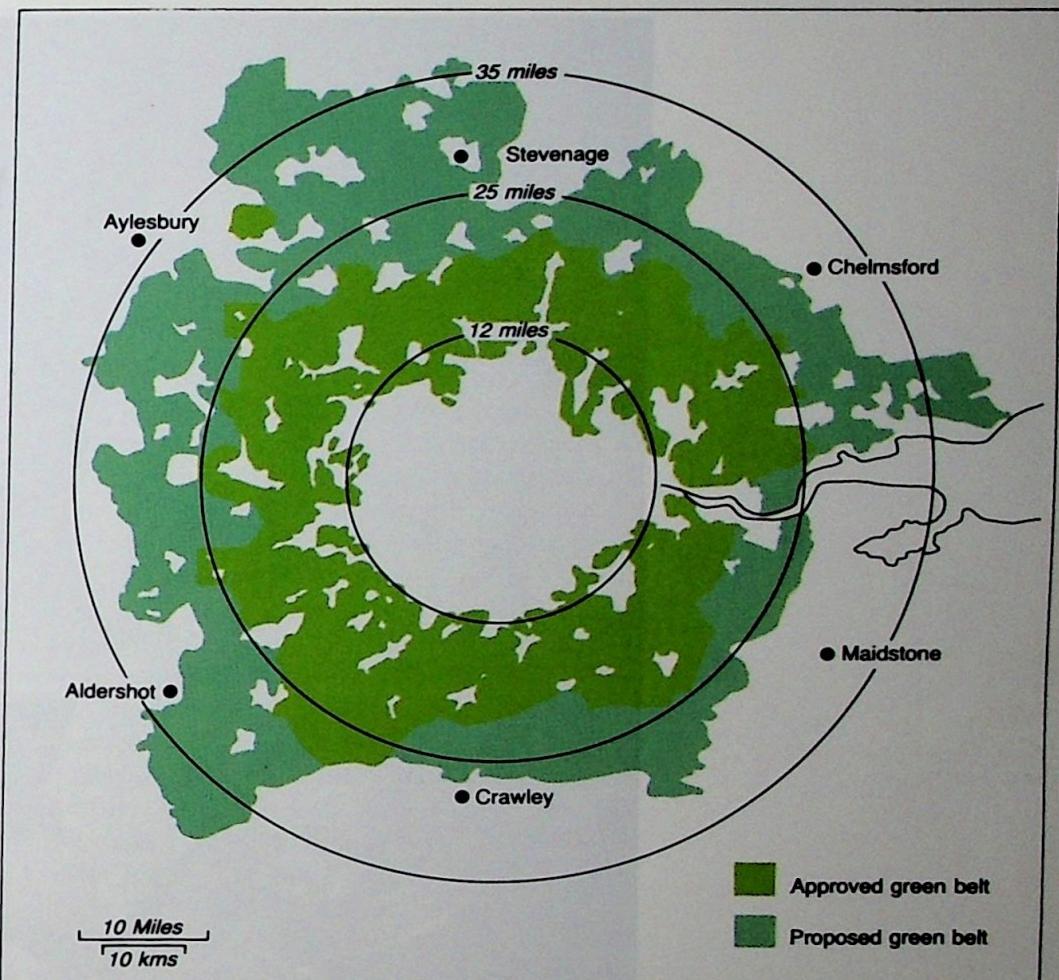
However it turned out that town development would have been an impossible burden for the county ratepayers. The payments proposed by Middlesex under the Act would have paid for the necessary houses and sewerage but not for the extra costs at the schools. This sank the whole idea because education in Peterborough was then the financial responsibility of the tiniest county council in the land – the Soke of Peterborough. So minuscule was the Soke that city ratepayers accounted for over nine-tenths of its income.

If the fifties were largely fruitless years for advocates of new towns, they were important ones for town planning generally. At every shire and city hall, planners worked away on the new development plans called for in the Town Planning Act 1947. And in August 1955 Duncan Sandys, Minister of Housing and Local Government, issued a circular giving firm government backing to green belts. In London's green belt only 'in-filling' and 'rounding-off' of towns and villages would be permitted.

For The Council for the Preservation of Rural England and allied interests the Sandys circular was a great victory in the battle against metropolis. At last London had been penned up. Well, not quite. J. R. (Jimmy) James, deputy planner at the Ministry of Housing, set out the reality at a conference in 1960.

'The green belt is an excellent instrument for providing the town dweller with readier access to the open country, for giving sharper edge between town and field, for preventing unlimited sprawl and for stopping the coalescence of neighbouring towns, but its value must not be debased by being mis-applied. It cannot stop growth in the city region. It can only shape it.'<sup>10</sup> In London's case Peterborough was destined to be part of that shape.

*London's Green Belt in 1964.*





*Tea time in London in the  
nineteen sixties. (BBC Hulton  
Picture Library)*

### 3. WESTMINSTER FIXES ITS EYE ON PETERBOROUGH

New towns were put back on the political agenda by three forces: a surge of growth in the population; the evergreen issue of congestion and bad housing in the great cities; and the emergence, in Scotland, of the idea that new towns could be 'growing points' for regions in economic decline.

The surge in population was, no doubt, a by-product of the boom years of the late fifties although folklore had it that people were copying Queen Elizabeth. Wyndham Thomas, who became director of the Town and Country Planning Association in 1955, was a watcher of the Registrar General's forecasts. 'People used to talk about another Coventry every year.'

Nowhere did the effects of the boom loom larger than in London and the Home Counties. In the decade up to 1961 jobs in Central London increased by 150,000 while the number of long-distance railway commuters grew by 100,000. And behind every additional commuter there was (in theory) another household and another house. There were more cars too. In the City of London and the West End (and in Croydon) office blocks with graph-paper facades, their bases scoured by gusting winds, were built to house the fast-growing world of advertising, insurance and other services. The traffic generated by their busy occupants made congestion in the streets still worse.

Meanwhile good times in London, as always, drew people in – from the North, from Scotland and from the Caribbean. Competition for housing increased. Illegal evictions of poor and elderly tenants increased too as Rachman and other ruthless landlords sought to create saleable vacant possessions. By 1963 London was esti-

mated to contain 5,000 homeless people and to suffer a deficiency of 150,000 dwellings.

In these circumstances the disenchantment of ministers with new towns began to undergo a sea change the sequence of which is minutely described by Professor Barry Cullingworth in his official history of new towns policy.<sup>11</sup> The Conservative alternative to new towns – expansion schemes under the 1952 Act – were certainly proving economical but for the wrong reasons. 'Town development is only a cheap alternative to new towns if, as now, it doesn't work', a Treasury official noted in 1960.

By July 1962 the Cabinet's Population and Employment Committee, chaired by Housing Minister Henry Brooke, began to study forecasts based on the 1961 census. These suggested that in twenty years the population of south-east England (the part of the country south of a line drawn from the Solent to the Wash) was due to grow by 2.6 million people. Half a million were expected to be sucked in from other regions and half a million from abroad but the rest would be 'natural growth' – a locally-grown human cloud of babies and longer-living adults.

Brooke's ministry got down to work, led by its redoubtable permanent secretary, Evelyn (later Dame Evelyn and Baroness) Sharp, and given technical strength by its chief planner, a charismatic geographer called J. R. James. Studies aimed at finding places for the homes of the future millions were got under way for the south-east and the west midlands (the region taking in Birmingham and Nottingham). By 1963, when drafts of the study of the south-east region were going to Cabinet, ministers were told that the expected population increase was likely to be

*Awaiting eviction: a picture from the London Evening Standard.* (BBC Hulton Picture Library)



even bigger than had been thought. Over the forthcoming two decades no fewer than 3.5 million additional people would have to be housed in the south-east.

**A**t the Town and Country Planning Association Wyndham Thomas was busy with the same demographic forecasts. In a paper on the south-east the association proposed more and bigger new towns and the planned expansion of existing ones. 'We said its going to happen, its much better to plan it. Here's how it should be planned', Thomas later recalled.

Peterborough was one of the towns listed in the paper. 'I had been up to the place and talked it over with the town clerk. So the first proposal that Peterborough be expanded under the new towns programme came from the Town and Country Planning Association and I was author of the document.'

The government's proposals for the south-east had no precedent in English history. They made the Abercrombie plan look modest. One of their objectives was to push people out to the fringes of the region where, it was hoped, they would not commute but live lives independent of London. The study envisaged three new cities all with populations of up to a quarter of a million. One of these 'counter-magnets' to London was to be between Southampton and Portsmouth on the Solent, another between Newbury and Hungerford on the M4 and a third around Bletchley on the M1. Stansted, then the proposed site of London's third airport, was to be a new town of 100,000 people. The five towns of Ashford, Ipswich, Peterborough, Northampton and Swindon were all to undergo major expansions to take 50,000 to 100,000 people. Smaller scale expansions were planned for twelve other towns, including Norwich.

Put together these schemes meant that no

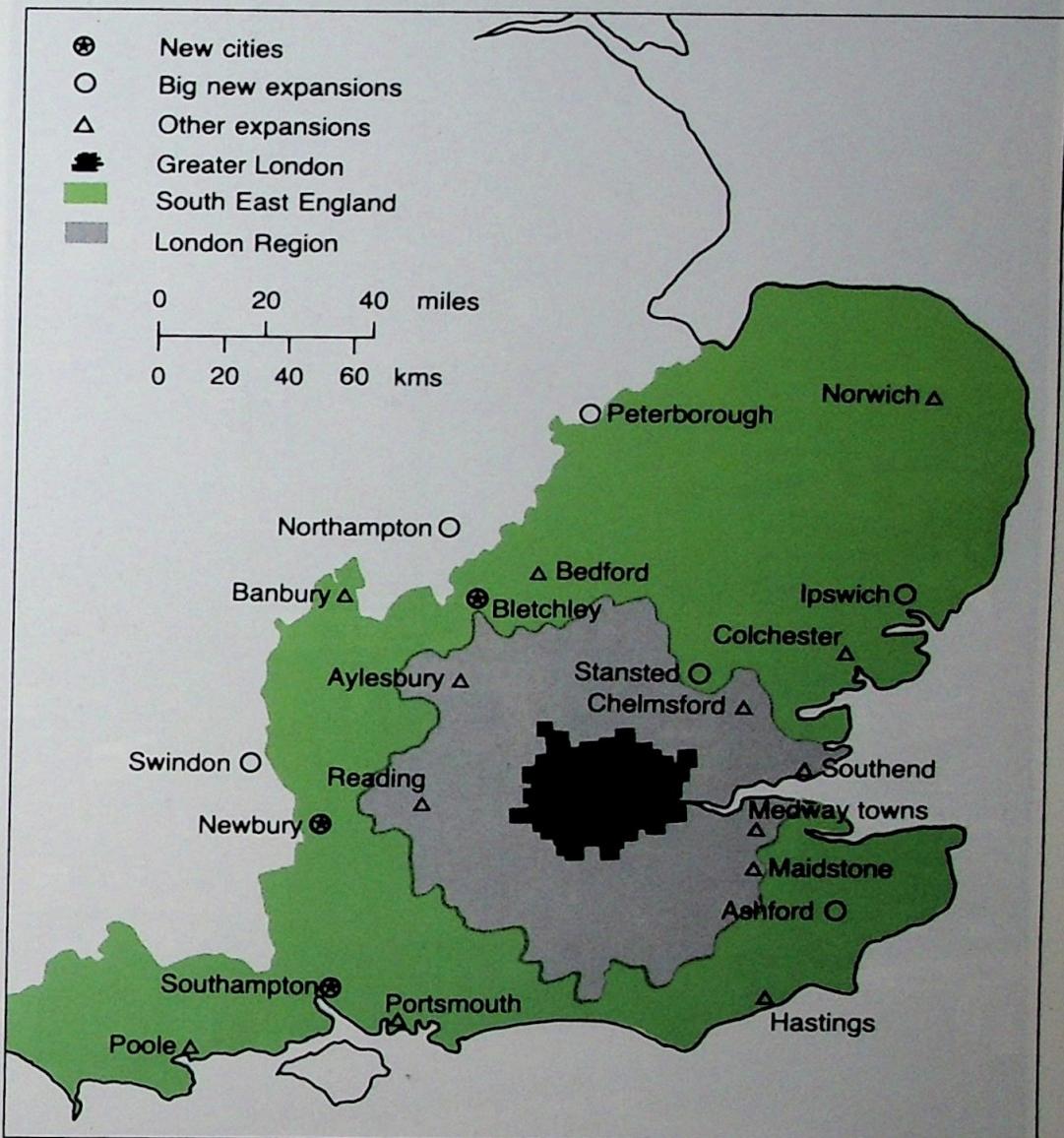
fewer than 1.35 million people would be housed in government developments – 850,000 of them at places over 40 miles from Charing Cross.

Growth on such a scale, and the investment that would be needed to cope with it, was a hot political issue. How could it be reconciled with the government's 'declared policy of giving priority to the development of Central Scotland and the North-East'? The argument raged throughout 1963. It was heightened by Lord Hailsham's passionate and successful advocacy of the need to give help to Tyneside.

The issue came back to Cabinet again and again during 1963 and 1964. It was argued that government-promoted developments were unnecessary and that the growth could be handled by agreeing a plan with the counties and getting the private builders to execute it. It was argued to the contrary that only new towns could handle such a massive task and that anyway it was essential to buy in advance the land needed for development.

Sir Keith Joseph, who succeeded Henry Brooke in July 1962, was positive that the government would have to get involved. He argued forcibly that '... town development is making no adequate progress anywhere, except where the London County Council are giving massive financial support and themselves taking a direct part in getting development forward'. He therefore pressed the case for development corporations although he thought that developers might finance much of the actual construction.

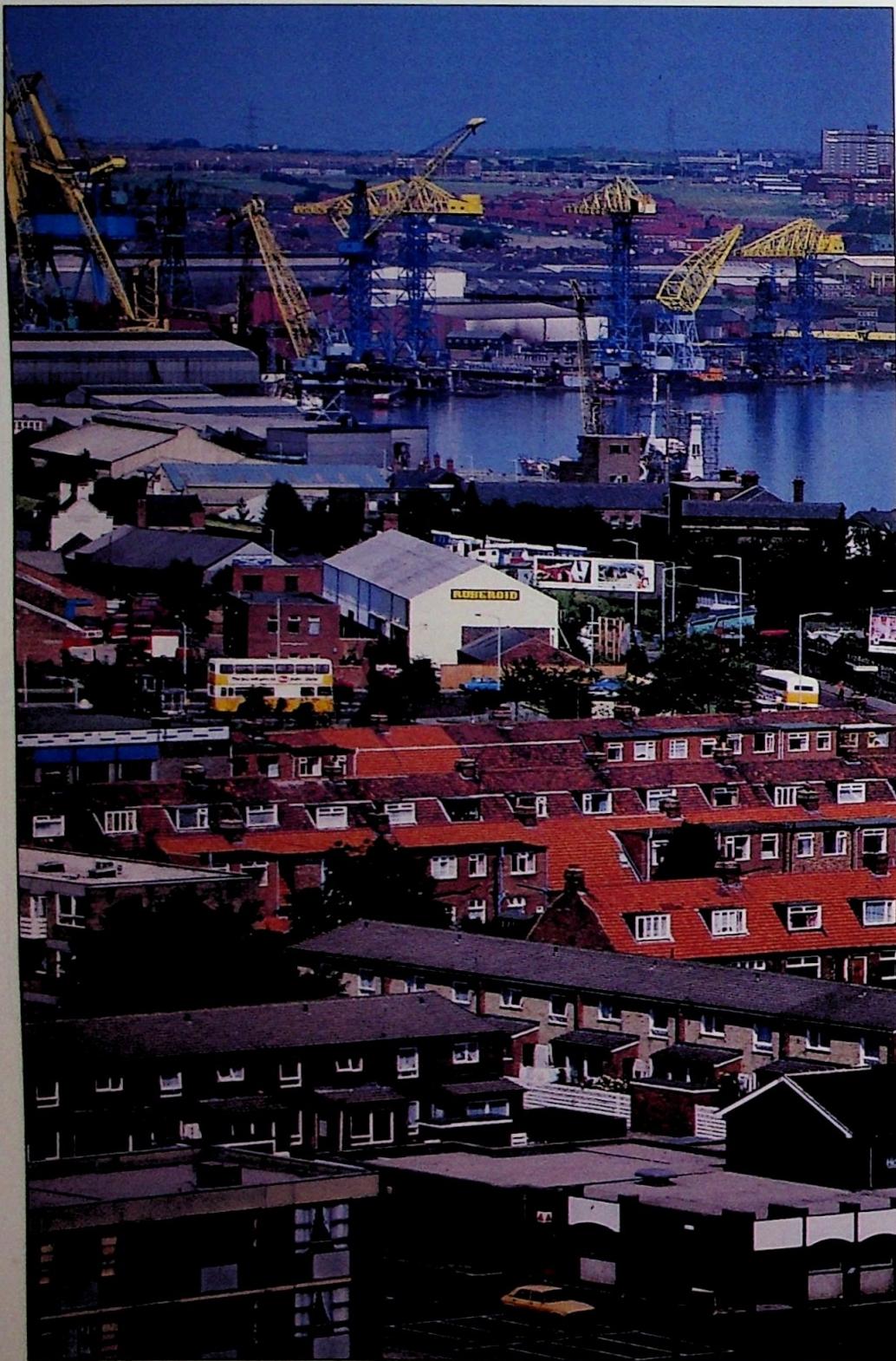
Joseph was also faced by the problem of how to handle the expansions that it was proposed to tack on to existing towns such as Ipswich and Peterborough. Development corporations had never been designed for that kind of work. The biggest expansion up to then had been at Hemel Hempstead which had had a population of 20,000 before it became a new town. More thought needed to be given to creating machinery suitable for the task and at a Cabinet meeting in February 1964 Joseph suggested that a single 'town expansion corporation' might be responsible for managing development at several towns.



*The main proposals of the 1964 South-East Study.*

The South-East Study was published in March 1964.<sup>12</sup> It was based, like the Abercrombie plan of twenty years earlier, on a green belt and new towns. The main difference was that the new towns of the 1960s were much further from the metropolis. Otherwise it was much the same – a pragmatic hunting for holes into which to drop bundles of people. There was no grand design.

Across the Channel, in another booming megacity, a different kind of plan was being drawn up. The French had started in 1960 with a



regional plan for Paris that aimed to halt the growth of the capital and divert it into '*le désert français*' – the provinces. It soon became clear to Paul Delouvrier, the responsible minister, that this was not going to work. A start was accordingly made on a new plan, the *Schema Directeur d'aménagement et d'urbanism de la région de Paris*.<sup>13</sup> This looked forward to the end of the century and catered for an additional five million people in two great corridors of development running for between 40 and 50 miles along both banks of the river Seine.

The regional planning of Paul Delouvrier, the French Prime Minister's special delegate, and of J. R. James and his team of planners at the Ministry of Housing, could not have been more different. The *Schema Directeur* was a grand design organised, like Versailles or Paris west from the Tuileries, around axes. The South-East Study was not a physical design at all but the outcome of a pragmatic search along the main railways leading out of London for likely growth points.

There was another significant contrast in the two plans. Although the London study proposed new towns and cities on an unprecedented scale, land for houses for the vast bulk of the forecast growth in population – at least 2.25 million people – was left to be identified by local planning authorities. They would include it in their development plans in the normal way, the Minister would vet the plans and builders would build the houses. Some would be for councils but most would be for sale.

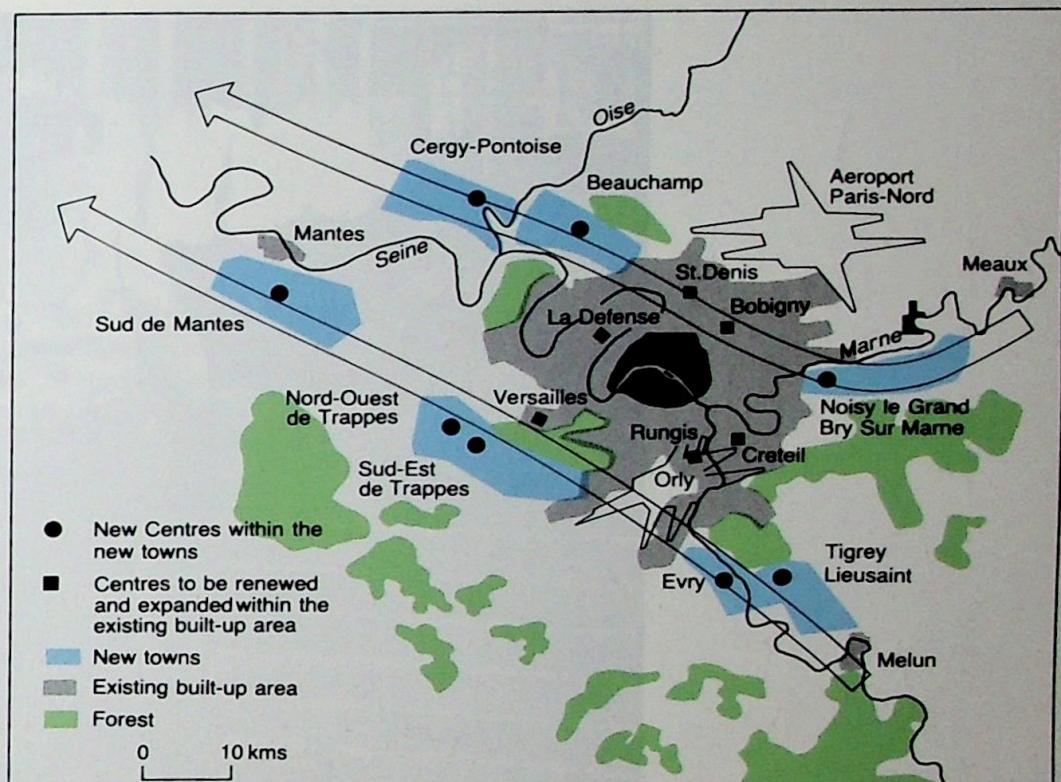
In other words it was to be Middlesex and the thirties all over again – but with a different shape. There would be no ribbon development. The county planning committees would see to that. There would be no building on the fringes of the metropolis. The newly agreed green belt would see to that. Development, instead of being clustered around the Underground, would spread along the new motorways. In Paris, by contrast, the vast majority of the expected growth in population was allocated sites in the master plan. Power in France was more centralised than in Britain.

At Westminster ministers remained uneasy until the very end about the huge scale of government intervention implied by the South-East Study. It was accepted that there would have to be subsidised houses for those with modest incomes. It was certain that there would be more scope for private builders than in the new towns of the 1940s. It was not clear how big a job to hand over to development corporations or to Keith Joseph's new 'town expansion corporations'. The White Paper *South-East England* of March 1964 (Cmnd. 2308) accordingly sketched out the scale of the problem – an overflow of one million people from London 400,000 of whom would need to settle within commuting range of the metropolis but 600,000 of whom might go beyond it – but did not commit the government to the proposals in the South-East Study. Nor, with a general election in prospect, did it address the problem of creating development corporations suitable to play a 'partnership' role with city councils.

New towns had nevertheless again become acceptable to the Conservatives. Between 1960 and 1964 the Tories agreed to eight of them, six of which reached the designation stage before the return of the Labour Government.

As is so often the case the election transformed uncertainty into conviction. With the South-East Study on the table the manifestos of the Conservative and Labour parties both promised action to deal with over-abundant London. Labour made a further commitment – 'to check the drift to the South'.

Harold Wilson's first Government, elected to create 'the white heat of a technological revolution', took office on 16th October 1964. Richard Crossman, brilliant, tank-headed, intellectual socialist, became Minister of Housing and Local Government and thus the minister for new towns. He immediately took up the London issue – and immediately ran into opposition. George Brown, the Minister for Economic Affairs, wanted to get a national plan established before decisions were made about new cities for



the south-east. At the Treasury James Callaghan was worried about the £1,500 million cost of the South-East Study proposals.

Douglas Jay at the Board of Trade, the department responsible for operating controls over the location of industry, had other objections. With his inner London constituency he recognised the need to do something about overcrowding in the metropolis, but was apprehensive of the effect of the south-east plans on "the North". In a letter to Crossman written on New Year's Day 1965 he said that steps should be taken to ensure that new towns in the south were 'genuine vehicles for housing surplus population from London, and not engines for the attraction of population from outside the south-east'. He went on to argue the case for tightening the screws of Whitehall's control over industry.<sup>11</sup>

Jay also raised an issue which had come to his notice in Battersea. 'I think it is not realised in Whitehall how virtually impossible it is for the worst-housed families in central London to get a

*The 1970 master plan for Paris: starting from a base of nine million, it was designed to cater for five million extra people by the year 2000.*

OPPOSITE: Tyneside – in competition with the south-east for government resources. (Rex Features)

*The North: a miner's family at South Kirkby, near Barnsley in Yorkshire.* (Homer Sykes: Camera Press London)



house in a new town. In the hundreds of cases I have handled over fifteen years I can hardly recall a single one where the new towns were a real help to the housing problem. This is because we have paid too little attention to real housing needs and too much to the doctrine that people should have a job before they get a house.'

Jay wanted to see the 'jobs first' rule broken. He believed that, where housing hardship dictated it, people who had to commute back to London ought to have been allowed to move to new towns.

Notwithstanding such arguments Crossman convinced his colleagues of the urgent need for action. A compromise was stitched together. There would be a review of the South-East Study and an interim announcement on a further ring of London new towns. On 3rd February 1965 Crossman rose in the House of Commons and announced: 'Immediate decisions are necessary if

we are to avoid a disastrous gap in housing for Londoners.

'To prevent this, the Government propose, as an interim measure, to go ahead with a new town in North Buckinghamshire (the future Milton Keynes) and with the expansion of Ipswich, Peterborough and Northampton. I will shortly be discussing with local authorities concerned the measures needed to implement these proposals including the surveys that will be needed to determine the precise siting of the development. In particular, I shall be considering with them the desirability of using the machinery of the New Towns Act for these schemes.'

Crossman wrote in his diary that officials were 'a bit doubtful' about this statement. He did not explain why but added, with self-satisfaction, that, thanks to the efforts of his PR man in Fleet Street, his momentous announcement had gone across 'pretty well'.<sup>14</sup>

## 4. GOING SLOWLY

Richard Crossman's announcement in the House of Commons did not guarantee that Peterborough would be a new town. Many administrative and parliamentary hurdles had to be crossed before ministerial declaration became legislative certainty. Some preparations had already been made.

Peter Clarke, town clerk at Peterborough in the sixties, had received a first intimation about the new town idea two and a half years earlier. 'I had – out of the blue – a request from a quite senior ministry officer asking for an appointment to talk about the south-east.' That the Soke might be part of the south-east was a pretty foreign idea in those days, even to a lively-minded local official such as Clarke. He therefore assumed he was going to be asked to undertake some duty in Kent. 'I was astonished when he said that to him the south-east was drawn from the Wash to somewhere around Bournemouth. That gave me a wider horizon.'

The official, W. R. Cox by name, went on to sketch the population explosion being forecast by the demographers and the plans to deal with it being worked on by J. R. James and his south-east planning team. In particular he described the possibility of tacking new towns on to existing cities (he named Ipswich and Worcester as well as Peterborough) and asked if the city council would agree to the government undertaking an exploratory study.

The council acquiesced and, soon after, Henry (later Sir Henry) Wells began work. Wells was a senior partner with Chestertons, the well-known London firm of chartered surveyors and estate agents. He was also a former chairman of Hemel Hempstead new town, in which capacity he had, it so happens, met a local councillor called Wyndham Thomas. Wells' report was published

early in 1964 at about the same time as the South-East Study. It was very positive.

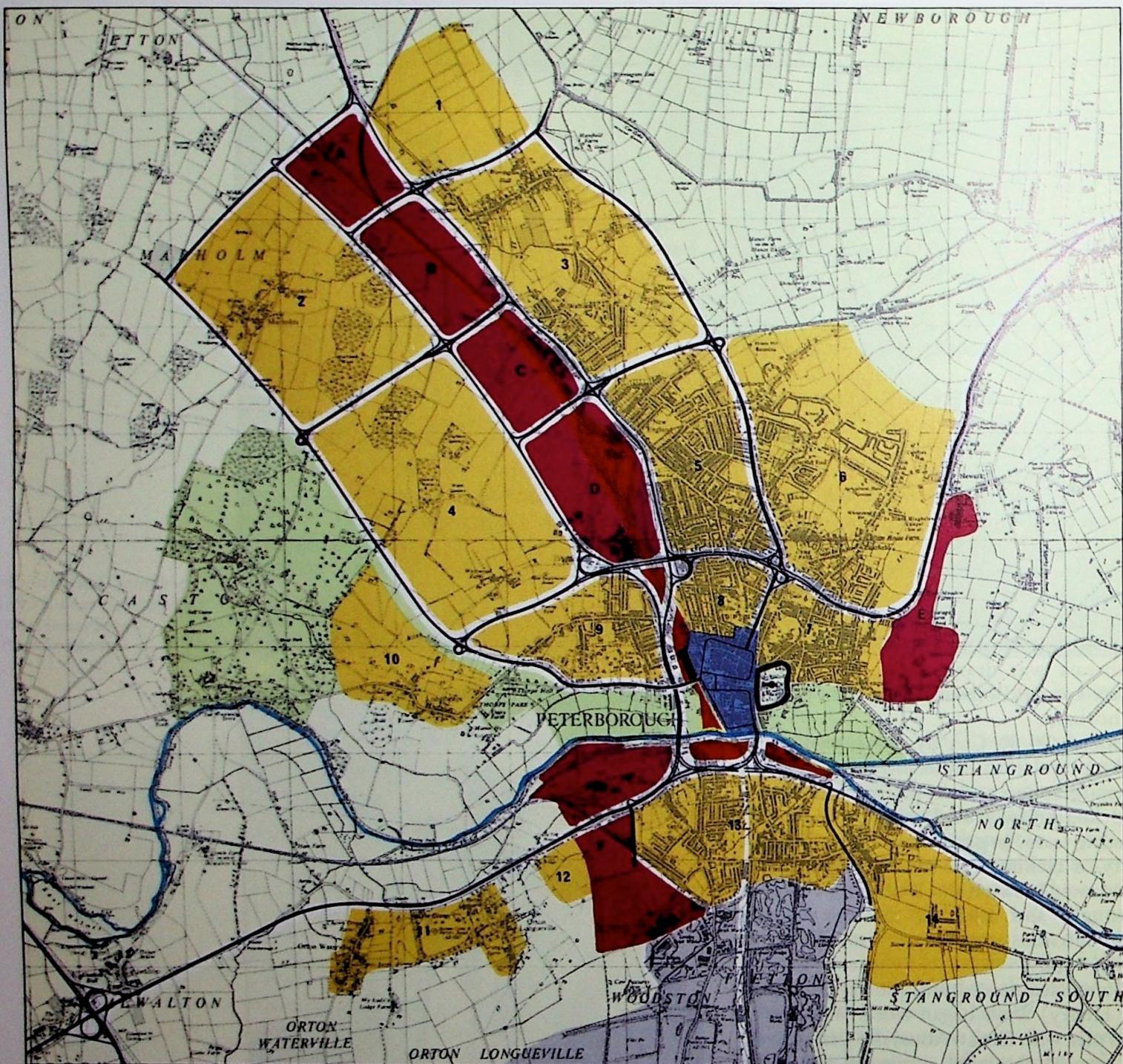
'Peterborough has a tradition of progressive local government with enough party politics to produce debate, but not too much to cause lasting discord. Both the left and right are moderate and forward thinking,' Wells wrote in his general conclusions.<sup>15</sup>

He went on to note the existence of good industrial relations, 'a football club of importance', objective local newspapers, and a particularly competent team of municipal officers. Wells concluded, 'the determined will on the part of the local authorities to face the considerable problems inherent in rapid expansion is perhaps the most important single factor in favour of choosing a town for expansion. I believe those in authority in Peterborough have this will.'



C. Peter Clarke, town clerk of Peterborough 1950–1976.

## THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT



MASTER PLAN  
100% EXPANSION

Scale: 1 $\frac{3}{4}$  miles to 1 mile.



Residential.



Industrial.



Central Area.



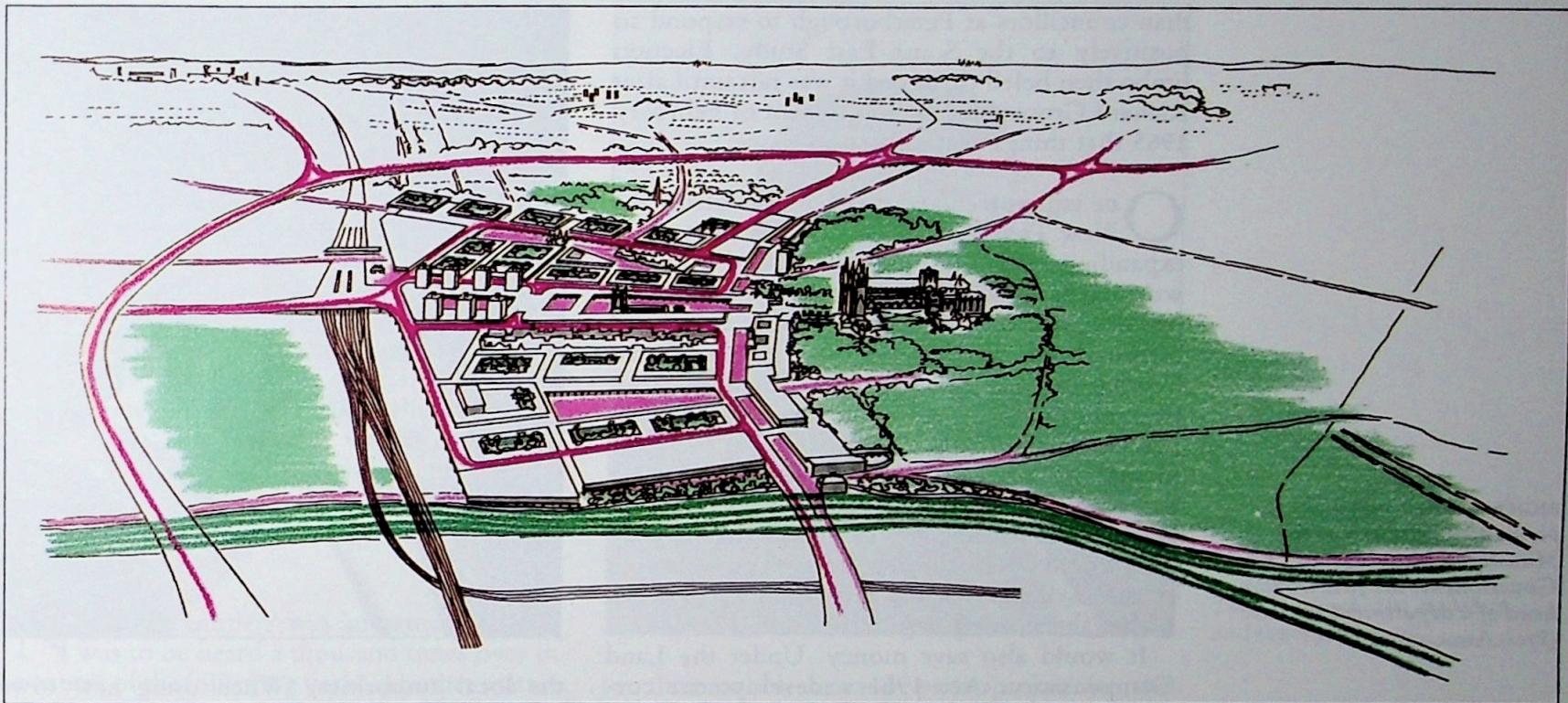
Parkland.



Railway.



Disused Claypits.



The Wells plan showed the town being expanded northwards up the railway and the double-decking of the city centre with cars on top, people below. Milton Park, the ancestral estate of the Fitzwilliams, was envisaged as a municipal park. Wells was a practical man and he pushed the town northwards because it was in that direction that much of its growth had up till then tended to go. His proposals for the centre were more trendy. They involved the uniting of highways and buildings into 'traffic architecture'. Colin (later Sir Colin) Buchanan treated Oxford Street in a similar fashion in his *Traffic in Towns* report, published later in the same year.<sup>16</sup>

The city council lived up to Henry Wells' expectations and, in June 1964, after members had digested the South-East Study, authorised the town clerk to give the ministry 'their categorical assurance that they have warmly received the indication of such expansion and wish the ministry to know of their wholehearted support (of) the government's plans'. Central figures in

creating this favourable atmosphere were Ray Laxton and Charles Swift, leaders respectively of the council's Conservative and Labour groups.

Swift knew well that the feelings he shared with Laxton were not universally felt. 'There was an awful lot of opposition in the very early stages. The establishment said, "Why do we want to grow? We're happy as we are now".' For Swift there was no greater symbol of the establishment than the Soke of Peterborough County Council and its chairman, the Marquis of Exeter. The Soke was the planning authority and 'the little rural villages were the ones that made the decisions'.

For Swift, the villages had a rural mentality. 'They really hadn't got the sort of feeling we had. We could see there was going to be a decline in the railways, in the brickfields and in engineering, so we were very interested in the South-East Study. Ray and I were enthused by it. We said to ourselves we want to be in here if there is half a chance.'

Ministers at Westminster found it less easy

*The Wells' plan envisaged sweeping motorways and a double-decked city centre.*

**OPPOSITE:** Henry Wells' 1963 plan for doubling the size of Peterborough.

than councillors at Peterborough to respond so positively to the South-East Study. Election limbo then befell them and it was not until after Richard Crossman's announcement of February 1965 that things again began to move.

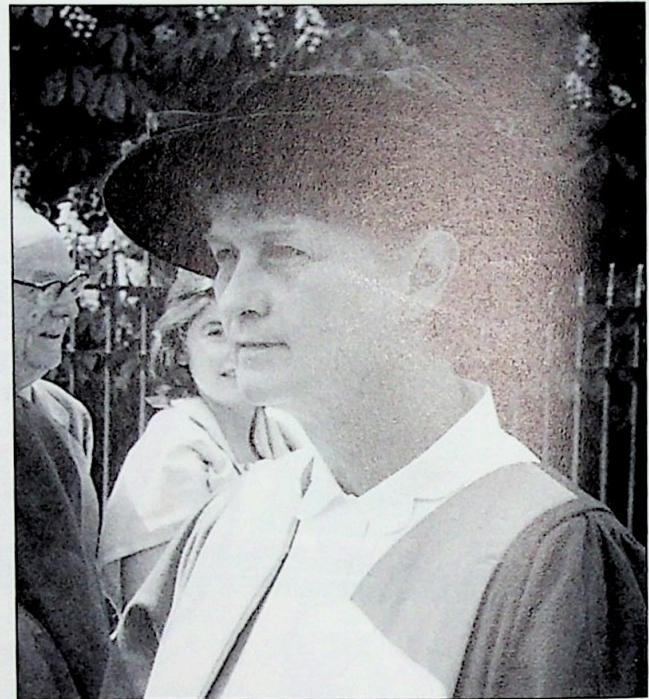
**O**ne still unresolved problem was fitting the New Towns Act machinery to the task of expanding an existing city. Professor Cullingworth tells how Ministry of Housing officials had been working on this and how, in an internal memo dated April 1965, they estimated that Peterborough was going to cost £125 million (not all public money) and set down the all-important basis for 'partnership'. They considered that the 'designated area' (the boundaries within which the New Towns Act would apply) ought to embrace the existing city as well as growth land. This would enable the development corporation, at the invitation of the city council, to work within the existing city.<sup>11</sup>

It would also save money. Under the Land Compensation Act 1961 a development corporation could buy land in a designated area at a price excluding any increase in value created by the new town. A city council could do nothing of the sort. It had to pay full market value.

The memo also proposed changes in the handling of town planning applications. In the earlier new towns, corporations submitted their proposals direct to the minister who, after consulting the appropriate local authorities, approved or rejected them. Approvals constituted 'deemed planning permission'. However the ministry officials reckoned this was too high-handed for something intended as a partnership. They therefore proposed that partnership corporations should always put their proposals first to the local authorities. Local authority partners would likewise be obliged to consult corporations about any applications they received from private developers. The minister would be umpire in cases of disagreement.

Another innovation concerned the appointment of corporation board members. The New Towns Act specified that nine members be appointed by the minister after consultation with

RIGHT: Dame Evelyn Sharp, permanent secretary at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government: the first woman head of a department of state. (Press Association)



the local authorities. 'When using new town machinery to expand an existing city', the memo said, 'it would seem appropriate that the personnel of the corporation should be agreed between the minister and the county and city councils; and that, if the county and city councils so wish, three or four members should be drawn from among their members.'

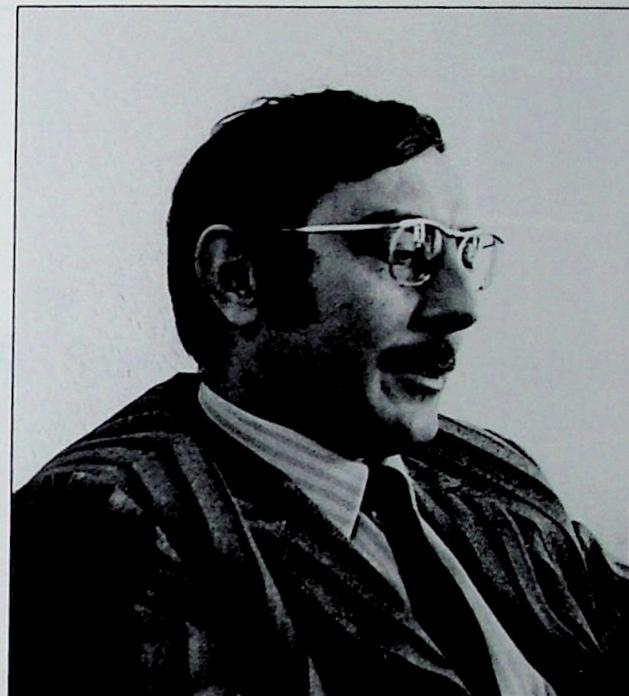
The desirability of the partners sharing staff and of the boundaries of the city being adapted to coincide with the designated area were both dealt with before the memo got to the all important question of finance. Here it was acknowledged that the local authorities would be faced with additional costs in advance of the growth of their rateable value and that this would have to be taken into account in the financial arrangements between the partners. The solution, officials thought, was to go for head-counting. Tot up the people being brought in by the corporation, work out what percentage they were of the town's growing population, and make the corporation responsible for paying that share of the cost of new services and amenities. The officials then held out what they clearly saw as a tempting

carrot. In the longer term the local authority could expect to receive those assets of the corporation that had not already been sold to private interests.

On May 5th Dame Evelyn Sharp, permanent secretary at the Ministry of Housing, visited Peterborough to discuss these arrangements with the city and county. The city's general purposes committee reported to the council that Dame Evelyn had made a strong case for the principle of 'partnership' between central and local government and done her best to reassure the councils that they would not be bankrupted by expansion. The committee pointed out that, while there was no guarantee that the rates would not be increased: 'It would be the government's aim to ensure that no undue burden fell locally as a result of the expansion.'

**N**o undue burden' was an expression that was to be heard a thousand times over in the course of the following years. Another matter raised by 'the Dame', as Crossman regularly called his permanent secretary, was the choice of a planning consultant. The ministry already had in mind a young and unknown architect-planner called Tom Hancock and Dame Evelyn wanted to be sure that he was not rejected by the councils for his lack of experience. She therefore warned the members that, with so much planning going on in the south-east, it would not be possible to find a consultant of national repute. She went on to bill Hancock as a rising star.

A final section of the city council's report dealt with the county council's fear that expansion would turn the humble borough of Peterborough, which contributed rates to the county's coffers, into a full-blown county borough which would not. This prospect of a new town cuckoo settling in the Huntingdon nest was a recurring nightmare for the shire and, following Dame Evelyn's visit, it had written to the city saying it would be 'unreasonable and unrealistic' if Peterborough were eventually to become a county borough. The county went on to ask for 'reassurance upon this point... as a condition precedent



*Tom Hancock, the architect and town planner.*

to their whole-hearted participation in the scheme'.

The city's general purposes committee played down the problem of the cuckoo in the nest. They saw 'very little prospect of change in status' and added, with considerable foresight, that the issue would one day be resolved by local government reorganisation on which 'we nor other authorities of similar standing are yet in a position to express any definite or binding views'. And there, for the time being, the issue rested.

**B**ack in London Dame Evelyn got on with appointing Tom Hancock. Within weeks a commissioning letter ('Telegrams: Locaplan, Parl, London') was sent to his Mayfair office just down the street from Norman Hartnell, the Queen's dressmaker. The ministry was to pay him £30,000 to report to the minister on proposed boundaries for the new town. He would then be paid a further £75,000 to produce a draft plan of the future Peterborough. This cost would be split with the ministry paying half, the city one-third and the county one-sixth.



*Milton Hall, the seat of the Fitzwilliam family. Some 2,500 acres of the family's Milton estate had to be sold to make way for the new town.*

The task facing Tom Hancock and his partner John Hawkes was a vast one. It was necessary to consider soil, climate, drains, traffic and all the other physical aspects of the city and then the manifold requirements of human beings from schools to cinemas and from religion to racial harmony. Out of all of this had to come a diagram for a town.

In the course of this work Hancock made many visits including one to Milton Hall, the seat of the Fitzwilliams, who owned much of the land to the west of the city. Hancock was ushered through rooms in scale with their paintings of horses by Stubbs. He found the Earl in the library.

'He turned out to be quite an ordinary person, bespectacled and rather shy, as I was. We chatted about the weather and then he asked why I had come to see him.' Hancock explained that it was because the Fitzwilliam land appeared the most suited for the new town. The Earl asked him why that was so and Hancock did his best to explain.

'The Earl didn't make any response but went over to a cupboard in a corner of the library and took out a gun. I thought this is the aristocratic response to a planner proposing to build a town, but he went to the window, poked the gun out of it and said, "Damn squirrels keep digging up my lawn".'

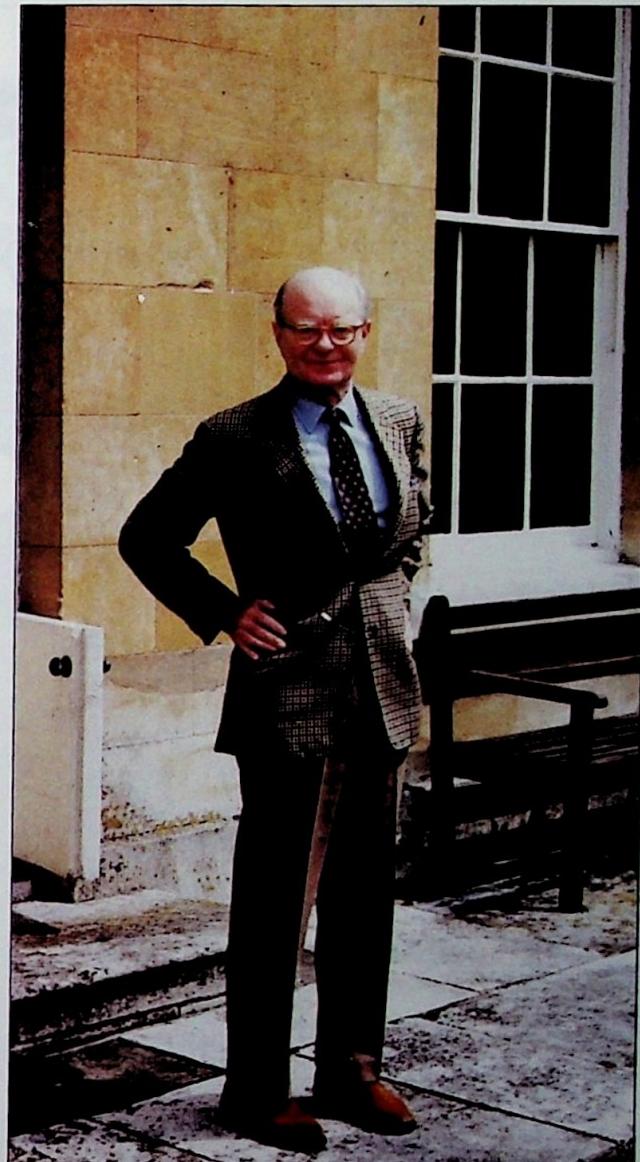
Hancock coped with this and other incidents

and managed to deliver his report on boundaries in January 1966 – five months early. Almost at once a divergence of opinion emerged between the city and the county. The city, as the town clerk's original expansion letter had made clear, was as keen as mustard on growth. The county, though no longer the minuscule Soke of Peterborough – it had, during the previous year, become the merely diminutive Huntingdon and Peterborough County Council – was as nervous about the new town as an elderly widower at the prospect of a vivacious young bride. The councillors continued to be worried about the cost of the new town and they did not like the boundaries Hancock had drawn. They wanted them pulled back from the village of Castor and pushed out towards the village of Marholm.

The two councils therefore decided to see the minister to tell him of their worries. The city's representatives were Councillors Laxton and Swift, leaders respectively of the Conservative and Labour groups, supported by their town clerk. On arrival at the ministry the delegates were ushered upstairs into a boardroom containing a mahogany table the size of a boat. There, awaiting them were parliamentary secretary James MacColl, Dame Evelyn Sharp, the permanent secretary, and J. R. James, the ministry's chief planner. There was no sign of Crossman.

**C**harles Swift was not particularly impressed by Richard Crossman. 'He was the most arrogant man I have ever come across. He was an hour late due to a meeting with Harold Wilson. That you accept. But then he comes stalking in, and he was really shirty. So I said, "Hang on a minute Minister, who the b\*\*\*\*\*y hell do you think you're talking to?".' Swift cut Crossman off as he tried to reply. 'I said, "Hang on a minute, I'm one of those silly b\*\*\*\*\*s that belongs to the same party as you. Now you might have a very brilliant IQ but you are not going to talk to me like that, so you can calm it".'

They then got down to discussing no undue burdens and Laxton pressed the Minister to give details. (The city may have been less anxious



*The Tenth Earl Fitzwilliam outside Milton Hall.*

about this than the county but the city's rate was already the highest of any non-county borough in the country.) Laxton therefore wanted to know what sort of offer the Minister was prepared to make. Peter Clarke listened attentively.

'Crossman either didn't know or didn't care. Eventually he said, "You gents must make up your minds. And if you don't want it, will you please let me know and I shall strike Peterborough off the list. It doesn't worry me. I've got other places".'

THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT



It was not at all what the deputation had wanted to hear but Laxton and Swift went back to Peterborough to line up their colleagues. Peter Clarke analysed how this was done. 'I think it was those two who did it and I would put Laxton first. Charles had the support of Harry Stedman (a Labour councillor whose wife subsequently became Lady Stedman the SLDP Peeress). He was very keen. I think he will also have found the leading members of his side in favour of the new town. Ray Laxton will have had to do a bit more work on the Conservative side.'

One problem for Laxton was that Harmar Nicholls, the MP for Peterborough, was against the new town and had the ear of Walter Setchfield, a cautious senior Tory on the council. It says much for Laxton that he was able to carry his party with him.

Crossman's Diaries contain no reference to the berating he got from the Peterborough delegation but the entry for June 29th modestly describes how he found himself 'clearing up another of the new town entanglements Dame Evelyn left behind'. It was the Castor versus Marholm controversy. '...open conflict had broken out between the town council, which wanted to accept our consultant's report, and the county council, which had put forward a counter-plan.

'The county of course wanted to put all the Londoners to the north-west of the town, whereas our consultant proposed to put them to the south-west where the gentry live in beautiful country.' Crossman got it partly right. The county wanted to go north-east as well as north-west. No doubt, however, he was correct in seeing at Peterborough the same city-versus-gentry conflict he had experienced as a gentleman farmer near Banbury, an expanding town under the 1952 Act.

Crossman adroitly dealt with the issue by adding to Hancock's draft designated area 2,000 acres of land around Marholm. Whether it or Castor should be part of the new town could then be sorted out at the prospective public inquiry.

These and other events at Northampton and Ipswich did not fail to leave their mark on Crossman. Summing up his two years as Housing Minister in August 1966 he described the 'town expansion corporation' worked out by Dame Evelyn with Keith Joseph as '...a wonderful idea but a complicated and difficult thing to carry out in practice ...' He used this assessment to support his proposition that Dame Evelyn, for all her 'quite unusual good qualities... her immense hard work and her patriotism and loyalty to the state,' had 'quite unusual bad qualities as well... her waywardness and her recklessness'. Twenty-two years later the fruits of Dame Evelyn's 'hard, slogging work' and 'superb drafting' seemed to be wearing rather better than her minister's diary judgements.<sup>14</sup>

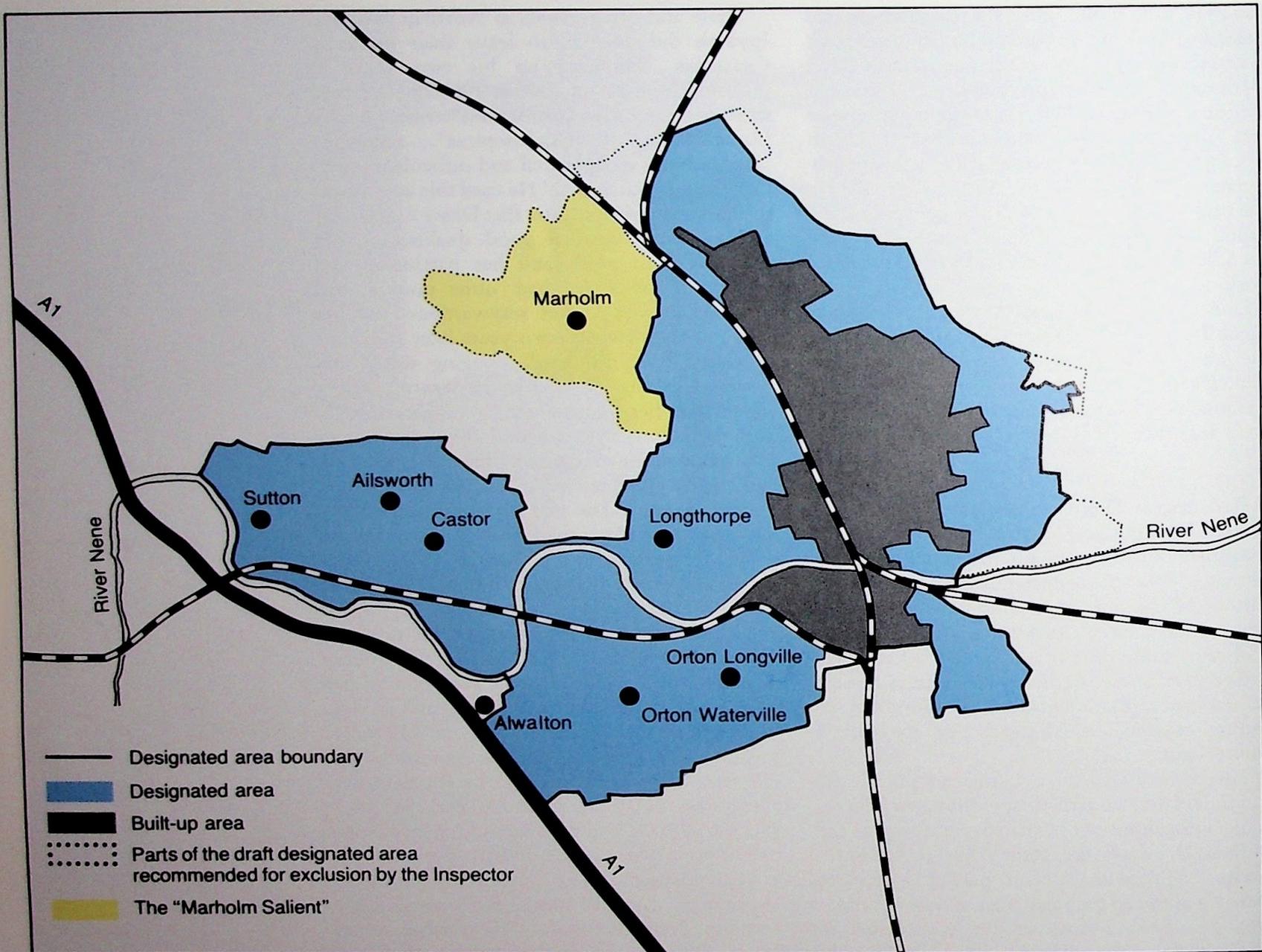
If the county was worried about the fate of Castor it continued to be ten times more worried, and rightly so, about what the new town would do to the rates. The new amalgamated county may have been larger than the Soke but it was still only a minnow with a population of 180,000 – nearly half of whom lived in the city. The county rates were high too – the fourth highest in England. In August 1966 this was set out with consummate skill by Ted Leafe, the county treasurer, in a paper begging the Minister for help. Leafe's calculations showed that highways for the new town were likely to cost £20 to £22 million and schools £10 million more. He forecast that this would increase the county's loan charges per inhabitant from £3.79 in 1967/68 to £5.75 in 1981/82 and put nine (old) pence on the rates – an increase of about eight per cent.

The treasurer's paper concluded by urging the minister '...to make special assistance available under the New Towns Act 1965 and thus contribute to the cost of what is basically a national and not a local problem ...'

This worry rumbled on behind the scenes without resolution until January 1967 when it emerged into the open at a three week public inquiry into Hancock's proposed boundaries. The inspector was Nottinghamshire's county clerk and he heard evidence from nine councils,

*OPPOSITE: Richard Crossman, Minister of Housing and Local Government (1964–1966), in the great board room next to his Whitehall office. (BBC Hulton Picture Library)*

THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT



*The boundaries of the new town and the Marholm salient added by Richard Crossman and excluded by Anthony Greenwood.*

nine farmers, a bevy of miscellaneous bodies (if that is an appropriate label for such as the National Farmers' Union) and no fewer than forty-eight individuals, the vast majority of whom came from Marholm and from houses called 'Lloret del Mar', 'Byways', or 'Grey

Gables'. Marholm did not easily take to the idea of being sacrificed to save Castor.

The city council was represented by the town clerk and by Neville Smallman, his deputy, a Cambridge-trained lawyer who, following in the tradition of the last abbot of Peterborough, later

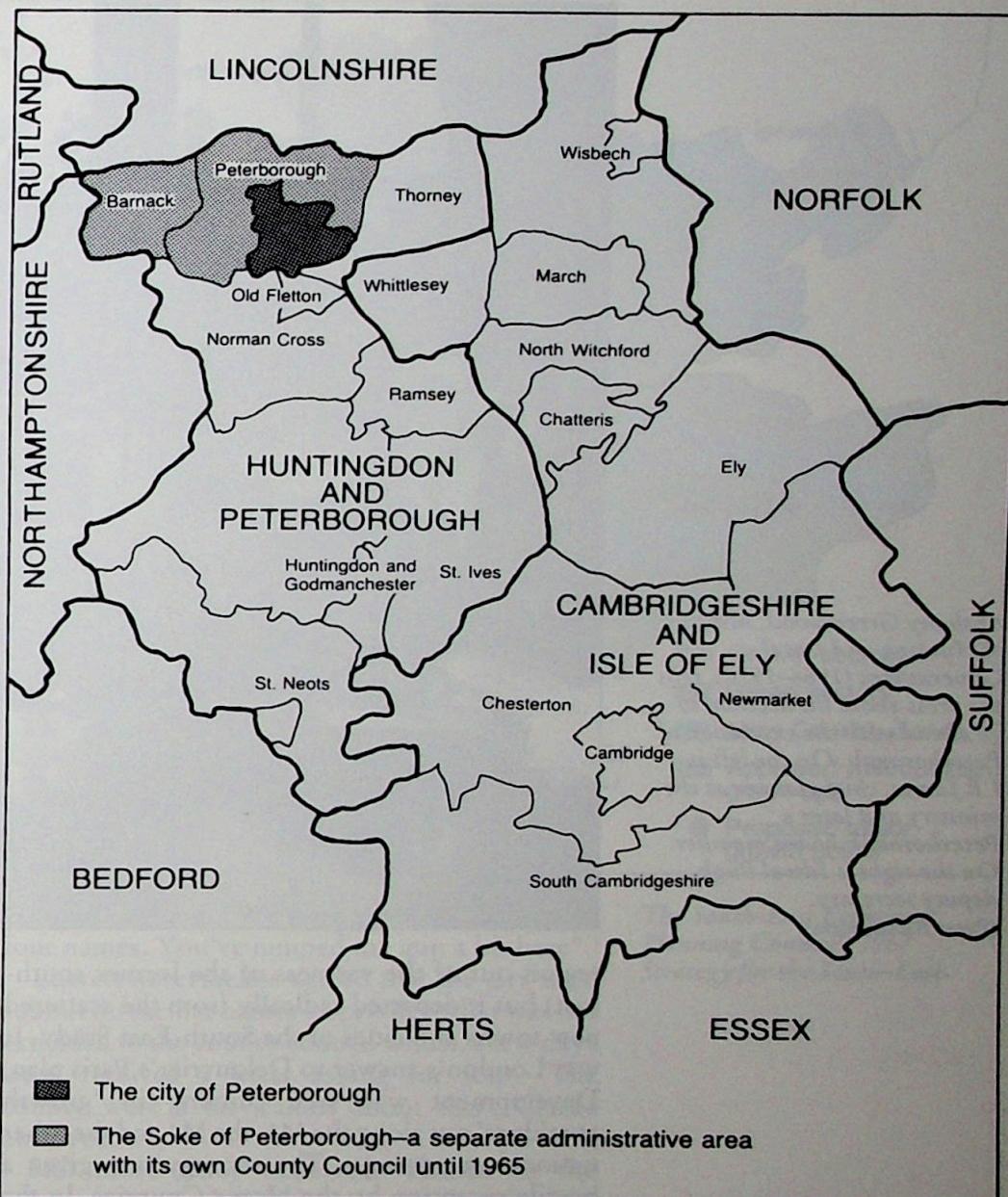
leapt deftly into the post of the corporation's chief legal officer. The only witness called by the city was Charles Swift, the leader of the council. A certain John Horrell of Westwood Farm gave evidence on behalf of the National Farmers' Union.

Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Brassey, chairman of the county planning committee (and descendant of the builder of the Great Northern line from King's Cross), thought that Hancock had 'failed to get the feeling of Peterborough' the pull of which was north and east towards its hinterland in the black fens. He added that Milton Park, and therefore Castor, which was beyond it, had always been thought of as 'impregnable', which was not the case with Marholm. However Milton Estates, the company set up by Earl Fitzwilliam to manage his very considerable property, took a contrary view. They owned farms in both Castor and Marholm, knew they were going to lose some of them, and made it clear they put a higher value on Marholm.

In his report to the minister the inspector noted that the most extreme objection came from the county on financial grounds (the city was prepared to take 'no undue burden' on trust) but that the main policy issue was new town versus agriculture. After weighing up all the arguments he concluded that the proposed new town was 'not inexpedient in the national interest' and gave his blessing to the area delineated by Hancock.

Bumptious Dick Crossman had by this time left the Ministry of Housing and Local Government. His successor was Anthony (later Lord) Greenwood who, on 24th May 1967, accepted the inspector's recommendation and authorised the expansion of Peterborough. 'New towns are one of our great success stories,' he told the Press at a briefing in the great boardroom overlooking the bottom of Whitehall. 'The need for more new towns is as urgent as ever. We must keep up the momentum.'

A Strategy for the South-East, a report published in the same year by the South-East Economic Council, developed Greenwood's theme. It did not look as far as Peterborough, (the government had by then carved an East Anglian



*Peterborough's changing boundaries: the municipality of Peterborough lay within the Soke of Peterborough (a county) until 1965; between 1965 and 1974 it was in the County of Huntingdon and Peterborough: after that*

*the new District of Peterborough, with the cathedral city at its centre, and the old County of Huntingdon and Peterborough became part of an enlarged County of Cambridgeshire. The map shows administrative*

*boundaries from 1965 to 1974. County names are shown in capitals. The names of municipal boroughs and urban and rural districts are in lower case.*

*Anthony Greenwood, Minister of Housing and Local Government (1966–1970), tells the press about his decision to go ahead with the expansion of Peterborough. On the left is J R James, chief planner at the ministry and later a Peterborough board member. On the right is Idwal Pugh, deputy secretary.*  
(Press Association)



region out of the vastness of the former south-east) but it departed radically from the scattered new towns and cities of the South-East Study. It was London's answer to Delouvrier's Paris plan. Development was seen running in 'growth corridors' out along the M1, the M4 and the other national motorways. The strategy was given a hostile reception by the Home Counties. In the north it was viewed with horror.

Anthony Greenwood, Member of Parliament for Rossendale, a Lancashire mill town, was not a man to disregard the lobby for the north. His announcement about Peterborough was therefore camouflaged by progress reports on new towns at Warrington and Central Lancashire. The minister said something else: '...many of these projects will be based on sizable existing

towns and will combine growth with the urgent task of renewal. I particularly welcome this approach. The task of urban renewal which we face throughout the country is massive.' It was an omen.

When The Peterborough New Town (Designation) Order was laid before Parliament on 27th July 1967 the Marholm salient added by Crossman had been lopped off again. This and the excision of a sewage works and a handful of farms enabled Greenwood to claim, with more artifice than accuracy, that he was 'minimising the loss of good agricultural land'. The upshot was a designated area of 15,940 acres. It was not large. Milton Keynes, Britain's first 'new city', had been given 21,900 acres the previous January and at Northampton, where the county was

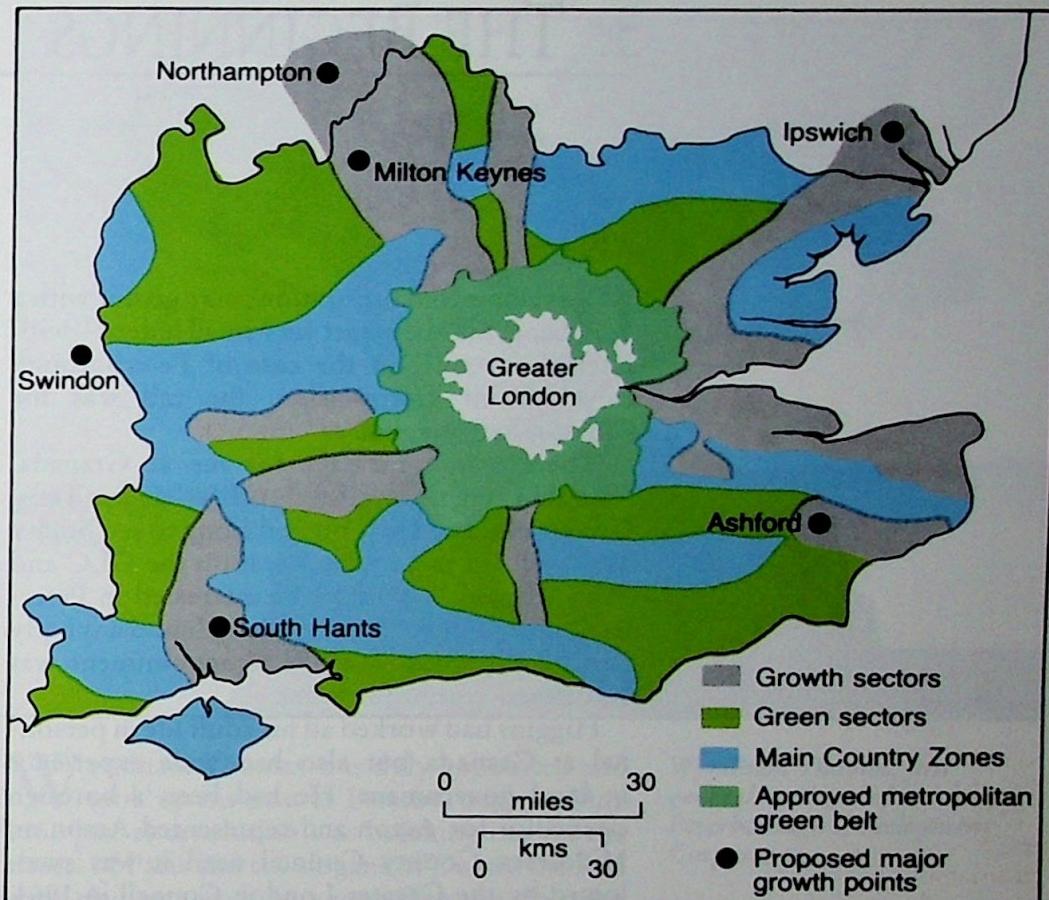
worried about a draft designated area of 23,600 acres, Hugh Wilson had cut it, but only to 21,000.

Meanwhile Huntingdon was keeping up its efforts to get the minister to promise something more precise than 'no undue burden'. Taking advantage of a clause in the New Towns Act 1965 inserted by opponents of the expansion of Stevenage, the Member for Peterborough rose in the House of Commons on 27th November 1967 and proposed the annulment of the designation order. As Professor Cullingworth notes, the object was not to object to the new town 'but to record the apprehension of the local authorities "as to who pays for what"'. In reply James MacColl, the parliamentary secretary, said that 'on certain matters "he hoped to make a generous agreement with them"'. This satisfied the mover and the motion was withdrawn.<sup>11</sup>

In a memo written in the same month, the ministry set out details of the 'generous agreement' which 'the Minister, with the concurrence of the Treasury', was prepared to offer. Up until 1981–82 the development corporation would pay 85 per cent of the cost of the main roads, £4 towards amenities for every person housed by the corporation, and 50 per cent of the capital cost of schools as soon as education investment became burdensome. It was an unprecedented deal and the county were more or less told to take it or leave it. They took it, but for a tiny authority they had fought a doughty battle – and they had won.

By the end of the year, and in a flurry of typographic errors, Hancock managed to deliver his draft basic plan.<sup>12</sup> It envisaged development at a Klondike pace – from 81,000 people in 1965 to 176,000 by 1981 – made up of 70,000 incomers plus the 'natural growth' of the existing and new Peterborians.

The city council was champing to go and the two party groups quickly told the town clerk which councillors they wanted the minister to appoint to the development corporation. Peter Clarke was given the names of Raymond Laxton and Charles Swift, the two party group leaders, and asked to send them up to Whitehall. 'I sent them off to Alan Leavett at the Ministry.



"Oooh!" he said, "We were going to ask you for four names. You've jumped the gun a bit here".

Leavett nevertheless agreed that the city need submit no further names – a privilege that was not extended to the county council which, a few days later, received a letter asking for four. 'The county were a bit jealous about this', Clarke observed.

Still more delay occurred. Thanks to the summer recess the designation order did not pass through Parliament until early in December 1967. By January the council was instructing the town clerk to write a 'stiff letter' to Whitehall telling the ministry to get a move on. When that produced no results they sent a delegation. Eventually, in February, the minister made an announcement. Christopher Higgins was appointed the first chairman of Peterborough Development Corporation.

*The South-East Economic Planning Council's 1967 Strategy for the South-East.*

## 5. THE BEGINNINGS

**D**evelopment corporations may go out with a bang, but they start very small indeed – with a telephone call. In the case of Peterborough Development Corporation, the call was for Christopher Higgins.

'There was a message for me at Granada. "Would I ring the minister's office." It was Tony Greenwood but I was invited along to see Jimmy MacColl. I'd just lost my seat on the GLC and MacColl said: "Would I be interested in Peterborough?" I said, "Yes, if you can't find anybody else I'll do it for you".' The appointment was confirmed within the week.

Higgins had worked all his adult life in personnel at Granada but also had wide experience in local government. He had been a borough councillor for Acton and represented Acton on Middlesex County Council until it was swallowed by the Greater London Council in 1964. He then represented Ealing on the GLC where he became planning chairman and deputy leader.

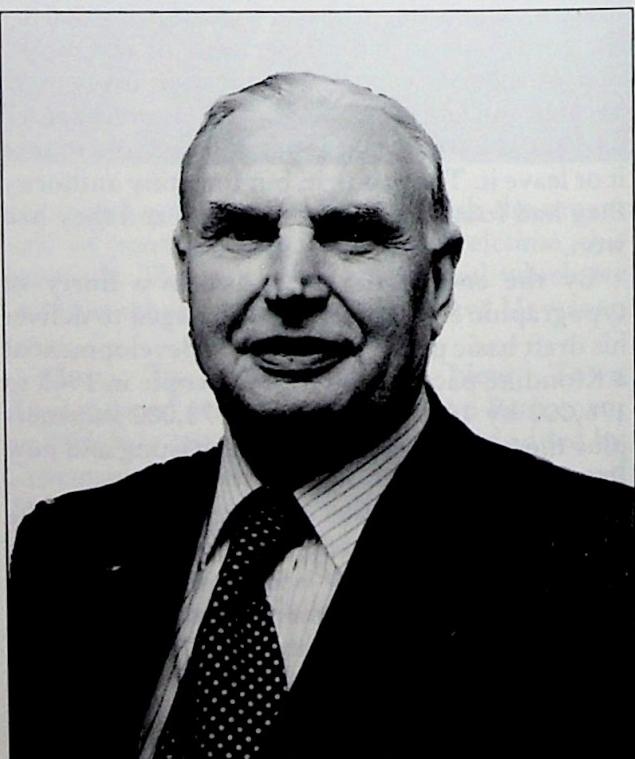
Higgins was a member of the Labour party but the very opposite of a tub-thumping ideologue. 'I love an argument but I want there to be logic in it. I don't know what a socialist is and I used to tell this to socialists at meetings. I used to get booed, but nobody could define a socialist.' He found too that he could get on with his Conservative opponents.

The new chairman's first tasks were to equip himself with a deputy and a general manager. Higgins worked on this with Idwal Pugh at the Ministry of Housing and made the unusual request for someone with professional housing experience as his deputy. He reckoned that his job as chairman was 'mainly a public relations exercise' but that he could be vulnerable without housing expertise to add to his own experience in business and politics.

*Christopher Higgins, first chairman of Peterborough Development Corporation.*

The ministry hunted amongst the great and the good and suggested John Dunham, a chartered surveyor who was president of the Co-operative Permanent Building Society. (It later became the Nationwide.) Higgins found they had a common political background. 'Strange to say he had been a Labour councillor in Wembley. I took him out to lunch. We chatted and I said fine. He was the ideal bloke for me. I was a bit of a public relations extrovert, but John was a quiet chap with very positive ideas about building houses.'

Peter Clarke, viewing the new chairman from his town clerk's office, was struck by Higgins' charm. 'He, *par excellence*, was the



smoother over. He didn't give the impression of radiating efficiency. He radiated smoothness.

'He went to local dinners and organisations – even in the early days when the new town idea was not so popular in the city as in the city council. Folk were a bit apprehensive. They feared that the rates were going up. Higgins was grand on that, absolutely first class.'

Higgins' experience told him it was essential for his first staff appointment to be the general manager. 'He had got to sit with us and appoint the people he wanted', I told John Dunham. I wasn't going to overrule whoever we appointed as GM. I said, 'He must have a big say in the staff because he's got to work with them'.'

Higgins also told Dunham what he thought about the corporation's power structure. 'Remember we are going to be part-time board members. All we will do is create the atmosphere in which the professional team we appoint can work – and can work without fear that some bureaucrat is looking over their shoulder.'

As the corporation at that stage had no money the advertisement for the general manager was placed by the ministry. Two hundred and eight applications were received and cut to a short list of sixteen which included two existing new town general managers. Higgins tackled the task with enthusiasm. 'I did not find it arduous. That is what I'd been trained for. Remember my job had been to find people that Sidney Bernstein would approve of.'

As Higgins leafed through the applications he found one from Wyndham Thomas, director of the Town and Country Planning Association, known in some circles as 'Mr. New Towns'. 'I knew him, of course, and I knew his enthusiasm. That was my only connection with Wyn. I wasn't in any way in contact with him. He would stand or fall by his performance.'

Meanwhile the chairman called his first board meeting and told his colleagues he would report to them in a fortnight on the short list. 'There were some mumblings. I said, "If you don't like any of them there are 208 applications here you can go through".' The mumblings stopped. 'People don't like work.'



*Wyndham Thomas, first general manager of Peterborough Development Corporation.*

Wyndham Thomas was duly appointed and took up his post at Peterborough in May 1968 just as revolution was breaking out on the streets of Paris and the slogans of Danny the Red were ringing across an uneasy Europe. By then the corporation staff consisted of Air Commodore Randles Wardle, a recently retired official from Corby new town, and Mary Walker, a temporary secretary. Wardle understood new towns administration and vital matters like how to get the money at the end of the month. He had acted as midwife at Milton Keynes and, after delivering Peterborough, went on to attend at the bedsides of Northampton and Central Lancashire. Mary Walker, the corporation's first employee, was to stay until wind-up day twenty years later.

Charles Swift, the leader of the Labour group on the city council and a founder board member of the corporation, was also in at the birth. 'They came into the town hall and we gave them a room down in the basement. I had to go round looking for a couple of chairs and a desk. We hadn't even got anywhere for Air Commodore Wardle to hang his coat.'

When the general manager and another secretary arrived to occupy the same pokey little room, Mary Walker found out what town expansion meant. 'Suddenly Wyndham opened a door and moved into the next room. I don't know whether it was official. He just opened the door and said, "This is it, I'll have a bit more room".'

Wyndham Thomas had no experience of managing anything like a development corporation. He had been a school-master and a Labour councillor (and leader of the council) in Hemel Hempstead and then leader of the lobby for new towns. His strengths lay in his silver tongue, his grounding in the planning of new towns and his connections. He knew everyone who counted – from the Minister of Housing downwards. Why had he been chosen?

'I had become by then the inheritor of the Howard/Osborn mantle. I was regarded, I suppose, as the spokesman of the new towns movement, as it was called. That helped. I was able too, to give as referees the names of some pretty distinguished people – J. R. James, the chief planner (at the housing ministry); Henry Wells, chairman, as he was then, of the New Towns Commission; Robert Grieve, chief planner in Scotland. Being able to call those names in aid must have helped. In any case the short list was not a very good one.'

However Thomas had one experience that qualified him uniquely to take on the task of managing one of the 'partnership' expansions conceived by Keith Joseph and Evelyn Sharp. As a borough councillor at Hemel Hempstead, one of London's first new towns, he had seen the effects of bad blood.

'What I found was real animosity between the town council and the development corporation. One of the first things that happened when I got there in 1951 was that a Conservative government was elected and the council, led by some very nice people, tried their hardest to have the new town stopped.'

New towns were then thought of by many Conservatives as devices invented by the Labour government to win seats by redistributing Labour voters. Housing minister Harold

Macmillan may have thought so too, but as he valued them as housebuilders he sent the Hemel Hempstead councillors packing.

Wyndham Thomas was depressed by what he had seen at Hemel. 'I felt that while they enjoyed their quarrels, the people suffered. There ought to have been a readier road to agreement. My advocacy was, "Work together not against each other".'

What does a wet-behind-the-ears general manager do on taking up his post? In Paris tyro managers could go to a *Centre des Villes Nouvelles*, but not in London. Thomas was left to make his own way. 'I was appointed with virtually no advice. You just had to go and find out what needed to be done. I decided to go around the other new towns and I became enormously impressed by the information and knowledge I could accumulate that way.'

In the very early days the board consisted of Higgins and Dünham, plus Ray Laxton and Charles Swift, the nominees of the city council, Peter Brassey and Eddie Collinson, the nominees of the county council and Clare Mansel from the GLC. All were appointed by the minister in their own right. They were not in any way representatives of their councils or any other body.

Two vacancies remained and Higgins was led to understand he could suggest names to fill them. He went first for a local industrialist. 'I twisted Ivor Baker's arm. He was always minded for public work. Ivor was a very feeling man – a very good man – and eventually he said "Yes".' Baker had been chairman since 1944 of Baker Perkins, makers of everything from commercial bread and biscuit ovens to printing plants. He joined the board in October 1968 and grew to take an interest in social development.

Higgins' team was completed the following January by J.R. James who, having left the post of chief planner at the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, had gone to fill the chair in town and regional planning at the University of Sheffield. Like Wyndham Thomas he had started adult life as a school teacher but had gone on to a career of exceptional distinction at the ministry



Sir John Garlick, later to be permanent secretary at the Department of the Environment, witnessed James at an early meeting of Neddy, the National Economic Development Office. '... his response across the table was masterly in style and brilliant in content. It contained more facts, more wisdom and more realism than Neddy was able to achieve for many years thereafter.'<sup>18</sup>

Back in the basement room at the town hall things were moving. A team of officers was being assembled. Houses for Londoners were under consideration and Higgins was pressing for a

start on the roads. Not much was finished by the end of the first year but much had been begun and the corporation had moved. Its new home was Peterscourt, a pink brick Victorian college topped by a row of huge Elizabethan-style chimneys. Sir George Gilbert Scott, the architect of St Pancras station, had designed it.

Nationally the collapse of Ronan Point brought to an end the era of residential tower blocks; Enoch Powell uttered his chilling speech about 'rivers foaming with much blood' and made a political issue of racial prejudice; and, much less remarked, the Automobile Association

*Peterscourt, the home of Peterborough Development Corporation from 1969 to 1975. In front of it the square named to commemorate Councillor Ray Laxton.*

decided to move its 1,200-strong staff from Leicester Square to Basingstoke.

All these events reflected Britain in the period when work was beginning on the new Peterborough. And, with time, all three impinged on the corporation. The sixties were amongst many other things a decade of system building, immigration from the new Commonwealth into the inner cities, and worsening congestion in London. It was therefore no coincidence that during the seventies the corporation set its face resolutely against industrialised building, came face to face with the politics of the inner cities, and urged other firms to follow the example of the AA but to go north to Peterborough.

**O**ne task given to Hancock by the ministry, concurrently with planning the new town, was to design a first estate of houses. Consultants working on the expansions at Ipswich and Northampton had been given the same job. The aim was to have some houses ready for the development corporation to build as soon as it was set up.

Hancock had chosen a site on the edge of the town looking towards Milton Park. Wyndham Thomas tried to get the scheme moving but as he did, his enthusiasm for Hancock and his plan gradually 'turned to dismay'. In the end he persuaded the board to scrap the pilot scheme on grounds of its impracticality and to take over instead part of the city council's estate at Westwood. (The corporation named its part of Westwood Ravensthorpe.) 'That was practical. The services were there and you could extend them easily. The city council were a bit embarrassed about completing it. They had run out of steam and I said let's take it over and build 900 houses.'

The conflict of personalities between Peterborough's consultant and general manager was the subject of comment in *The Times* in November 1968. In a piece on 'Judging Britain's New Towns', Jill Craigie remarked on the 'Machiavellian piece of casting' that had brought the 'brilliant' Tom Hancock and the 'zestful' Wyndham Thomas into close harness. The board subsequently decided against retaining the firm

of Hancock-Hawkes as their consultant planners and development control advisors. They appointed instead their own planning officer.

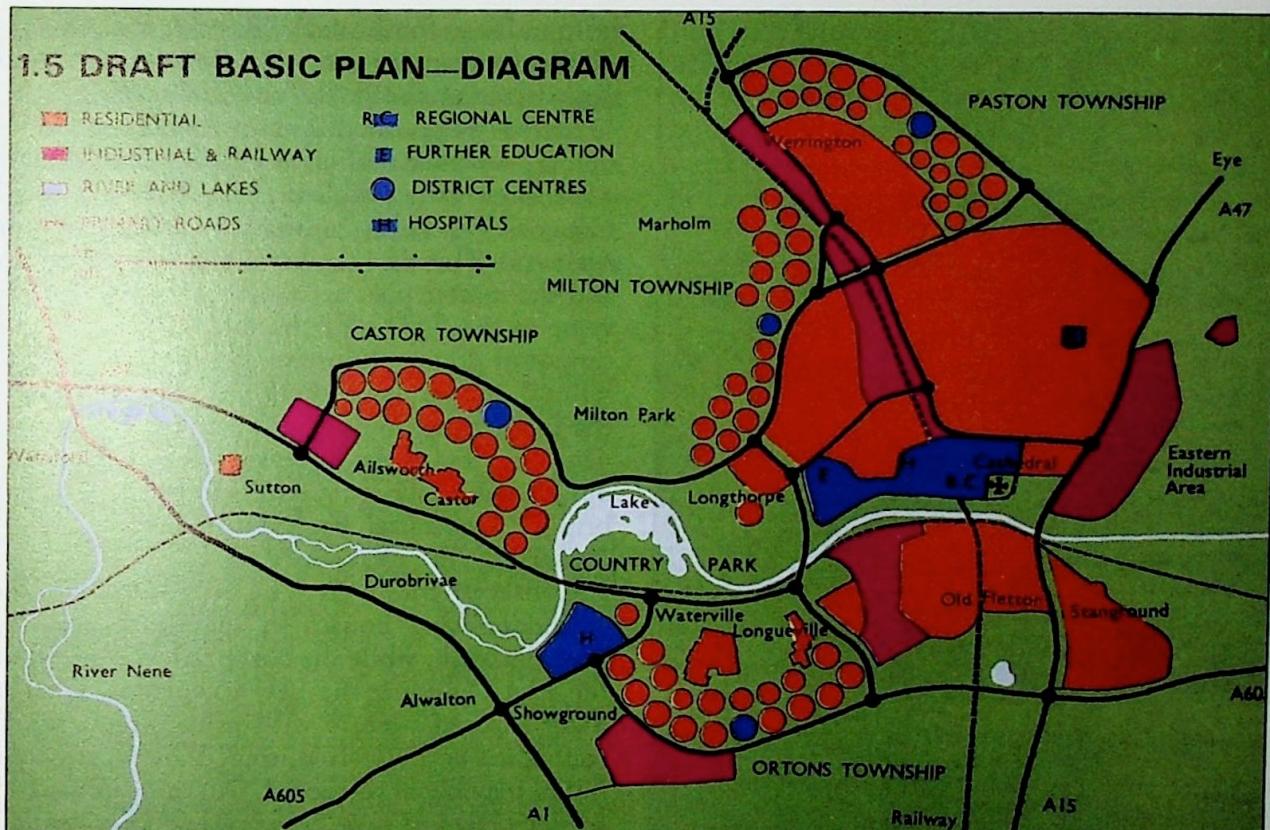
**N**otwithstanding the parting of the ways of the corporation and the consultants, Hancock's plan was a profound influence on what was to follow. One reason for this was that Hancock's approach to defining boundaries for the new town was to consider the form that 'Greater Peterborough' should take – and then draw a line around it. Nowhere was the constraining effect of this more clearly shown than at Milton township (later renamed Bretton). The township was shoe-horned into a long strip of land between the existing city and Milton Park. The corporation therefore had no choice but to give it a linear form.

Another reason was that if Hancock had tied the corporation's hands, the bonds he had contrived were, to a great extent, welcome. The general idea – four distinct townships, a great country park stretching along the Nene valley, the rehabilitation of the inner city, an enlarged city centre and, holding all these parts together, an armature of parkways – was agreed to be masterly.

But by no means everything in Hancock's plan proved acceptable to the corporation. The sixties, in addition to being the decade of the Beatles and the Pill, saw the number of cars on the roads grow from five to eleven million. The prevailing professional view was that, even in towns, this flood of vehicles was *in theory* best handled by motorways. This had certainly been Colin Buchanan's message in his *Traffic in Towns* report.<sup>16</sup> Both Henry Wells and Tom Hancock accordingly planned to equip Peterborough with a lacework of motorways. Where these roads crashed through the existing city, those affected protested vigorously.

Linear planning was another theory that failed to survive the rough and tumble of practice. It persisted at Bretton perforce, but by the time the corporation's planners finished designing Orton, it had vanished.

Hancock wanted a green city but he also



*The draft plan for the expansion of Peterborough prepared by a team led by Tom Hancock.*

wanted to create amongst the houses a feeling of townyness, of 'urbanity' as architects called it in the sixties. He certainly wanted to avoid anything that smacked of the suburban. The upshot was stiff little terraces of houses fronting on small public gardens or garage courts and backing first on private gardens, then on small parks called 'rides'. The draft plan makes clear that such houses were to be in the range of thirteen to twenty dwellings per acre. Hancock described this as 'a return in many ways to the lower densities, separate neighbourhoods and looser texture of the early new towns'. He was certainly not copying Cumbernauld but it was still not spacious enough for Wyndham Thomas. 'I was concerned that we should go for significantly lower housing densities than proposed by Hancock. In the end we failed because of the housing cost yardstick.'

Surrounding the townships was to be a 'green matrix'. 'The design must be bold and imagina-

tive, relying on clumps and belts of forest trees, and on broad swathes of open space to define the township and motorway structure,' Hancock wrote and it struck a cord with Wyndham Thomas. He had been smitten by the city's bleakness when he had inspected it before applying for the general manager's job.

'It was a bitter day and I motored around. I was so dismayed by this flat landscape which must have been marvellously wooded at one time. I felt that above all else we must smother it in trees and shrubs. So the idea of a green city was central to my thinking.'

In the sixties the residents of Peterborough's older districts were a mix of Britons and immigrant Italians, West Indians and Pakistanis. Many of their nine thousand houses were run down and Hancock found too that: 'Racial tensions are becoming an urgent and major problem . . .' In particular, and characteristically,



he found that, for the native Britons, the presence of the immigrants was the greatest source of dissatisfaction about 'the environment'.

Action was needed. Comprehensive redevelopment was then the conventional way of dealing with inner city problems but Robert McKie, Hancock's housing advisor, argued strongly against it. This was accepted by the corporation and the master plan accordingly underlined the value of the city's older houses 'for people who cannot or do not choose to spend much on their homes', and for newcomers needing a foothold in the town while looking for somewhere permanent. 'In view of the increasing demand for such old houses which the expansion of the city will bring, it is essential that they should be carefully conserved,' the plan added.

Conserved they were. The city council worked at modernising houses in the inner areas of Peterborough, while the corporation worked on the edges building the new townships. Charles Swift showed visitors with pride streets where traffic had been diverted, trees planted and eight out of ten houses re-roofed. 'All these houses are owner-occupied now. Seventy-eight per cent are Pakistanis. We made them a General Improvement Area. It was Mr Laxton's baby. If Ray was alive today he would be thrilled to pieces to see it. There is still a community here. We get very little vandalism.'

Hancock's 80,000 word draft basic plan was mounted and exhibited by the corporation in September 1968. Two hundred individuals or bodies submitted comments and, in doing so, made clear that something had to be done about the roads which, as proposed, implied the demolition of about 1,300 properties. Wyndham Thomas acted. 'I got out a set of terms of reference for the new roads and said, "Minimise the impact on existing property", and we reduced that number to about 200.' These modifications were quickly published.

The blighting of property nevertheless re-

*TOP: The fens in the nineteenth century. (Peterborough Central Library)*

*LEFT: The fens in the twentieth century.*

mained a problem until the confirmation of the corporation's master plan two years later. Houses that could not be sold as a result of blight were bought by the corporation at market value. By March 1970 fifty-nine had been bought and in some cases immediately let to a steadily growing flow of incoming staff. By that date people in post or appointed already numbered eighty-five.

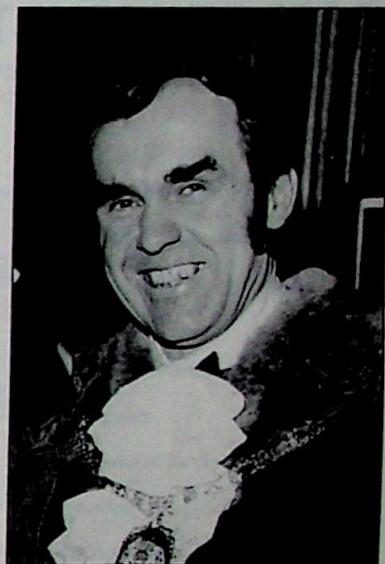
New town master plans are not statutory documents, but they undergo public inquiry and have to be submitted to ministers for their approval. The corporation would not be ready to do this until it had turned Hancock's plan into its own master plan. First came an interim version, an exhibition of which was opened by parliamentary secretary Arthur Skeffington in October 1969.

Skeffington had only the previous July delivered an official report on public participation in planning, produced in response to criticisms of the high-handedness of town planners.<sup>19</sup> The town planners were, of course, merely making use of powers that Parliament had given them. Yet these powers – designed to permit comprehensive development, traffic management and housing area action – threatened the Englishman's castle as never before. The feeling accordingly grew up that 'the planners' (a catchall for town planners, highway engineers and architects) were bulldozing their pet schemes into place. Skeffington showed how the bulldozer might be preceded by meetings, debate and consultation.

The newly-formed corporation decided to give its Greater Peterborough Master Plan<sup>19</sup> the full Skeffington treatment. The plan was exhibited at Peterscourt and peered at by three thousand Peterborians. Over five hundred of them made written comments. The next step was to make

further revisions and submit the plan to the Minister. This was done in September 1970 and accompanied by a third exhibition. A public inquiry followed in December. Glasnost had worked. There were by then only eleven objections and the hearing lasted a mere eight hours. Neville Smallman, the corporation's chief legal officer, was complimented on his impeccable brief by Anthony Cripps, QC (later Lord Silsoe), the corporation's counsel.

Yet if participation defused accusations of high-handedness it created other problems. Jeremy Rowe, at the time a managing director of London Brick Company, saw how local industrialists were up in arms against the corporation because the city's natural growth was brought almost to a halt by the slow process of planning.

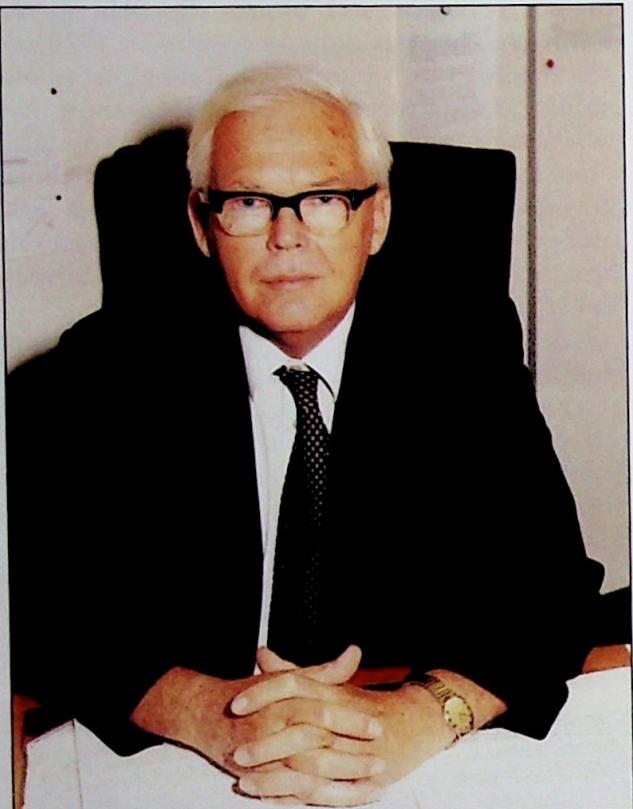


TOP: Councillor Ray Laxton, Mayor of Peterborough, in 1974.

RIGHT: The corporation's draft master plan being exhibited in 1970. Board chairman Christopher Higgins is to the left of the Duke of Edinburgh.



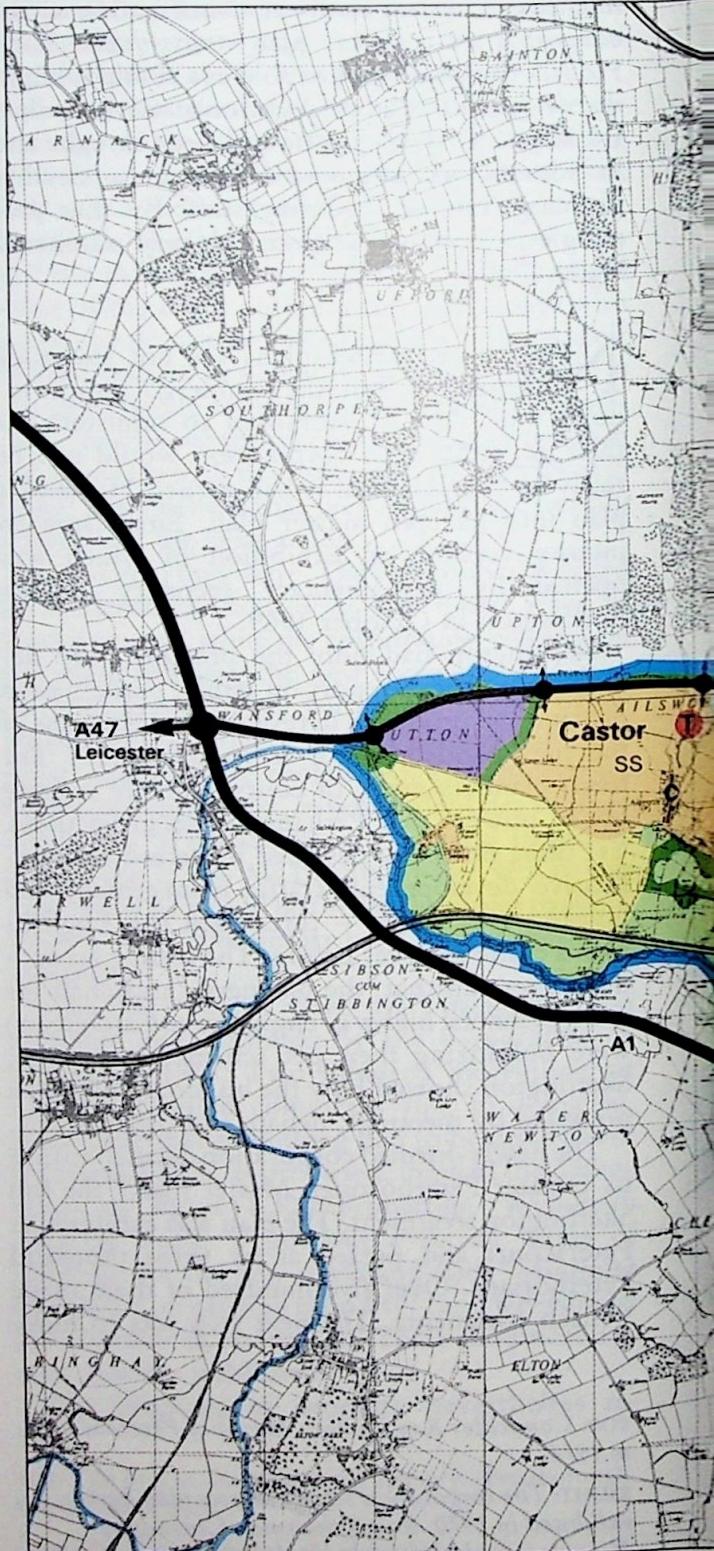
Jeville Smallman, the corporation's chief legal officer.



'I do not think Higgins or Thomas realised this. They were getting out of touch. It is too easy now to see how the pieces in the jig-saw fit together: it was not clear at the time and local developers felt throttled.'

At long last, in May 1971, the Minister confirmed the plan. It was six years since Richard Crossman's initial announcement and the review of new towns forced upon him by the Treasury had taken a year. Meanwhile Peterborough had continued to grow and the period originally allocated for expansion was shrinking.

Hancock's base year for projections was 1965. At that time the population within the new town boundaries was estimated to be 81,000. When Hancock added 70,000 incomers, their children and Peterborough's natural population growth to the base, he came to a 1981 total of 176,000. Looking ahead to the end of the century he foresaw as many as 225,000 souls.



# STRUCTURE MAP

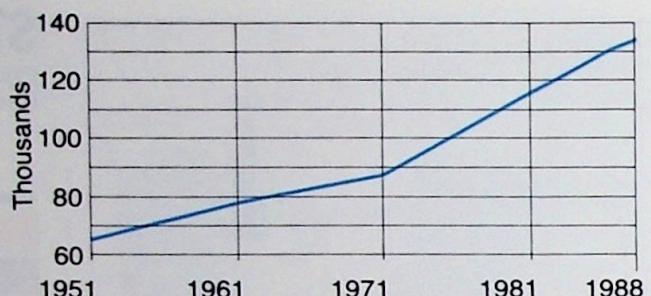
Primary Land Uses Within the Designated Area



Scale  
1:50,000 1 2 3k  
Road lines, widths & junction positions are diagrammatic

*The corporation's master plan for Peterborough which was confirmed by the Minister in 1971.*

*Growth of population within the boundaries of the new town from 1951 to 1988.*



The base year for the master plan was 1970, by which time the population was estimated at 88,400. After adding incomers and natural increase the planners came up with a 1985 population of 187,900. To accommodate all these people the corporation was going to have to build (or get others to build) well over 28,000 houses. Two new schools a year would be needed. The number of jobs called for was over 40,000. The corporation forecast an investment in land and buildings of £332 millions and made clear that the task ahead of it was herculean.

'No previous new town or town expansion has required the developing authorities to carry through a programme of this size, which involves the building by all agencies of an average of 2,000 houses a year for fifteen years, with a peak output of 2,300 a year over the middle seven years.'

Back at Peterscourt John Cresswell's architects were by now at work on the first houses at Westwood and planners were busy on the layout of Bretton, the first township. Ken Hutton's engineers were pressing on with the first stretch of the Soke parkway and the Bretton spine road. The parkway was needed on three counts. It would relieve the city centre, bridge the barrier of the railway and show that the corporation meant business.

'Partnership' was, of course, a buzz-word for the corporation and establishing one early on was a key task. Thirty-five miles away at Northamp-

ton, another development corporation had not long before decided to share officers with its host council. Higgins and his colleagues were suspicious of such an arrangement and the chairman said so in his first annual report. 'Lines of responsibility would not be easy to define or to keep clear; and circumstances could well arise which would place an individual officer in difficulties in trying to serve two masters.'

Partnership was sought instead by means of joint members' committees and joint working groups of officers. After a bit a pattern established itself. Board members and councillors met on an ad hoc basis and mostly to review proposals rather than settle problems. Officers of the corporation and of the city met monthly; officers representing the three partners met quarterly. And from 1972 onwards corporation officers began to attend city and county council meetings to speak to development proposals.

Wyndham Thomas acknowledged that it was bureaucratic. 'From the outside it must have looked overdone' and cumbersome. But it worked like a charm. For the first time, for instance, the education officers had a say in the siting of new schools. Previously they had been told where they would go by the city engineer.'

Judging by what Thomas learnt at general managers' meetings, partnership worked hardly at all at Warrington and less well at Northampton than at Peterborough. 'One reason was that it was a personal crusade for me. I felt strongly about it and dedicated much of my time to it. The easiest relationship to have with a local authority is a lousy one. You don't need to work at it. Just let misunderstandings arise. Believe what the newspapers say a councillor said, be hurt by it, react accordingly, and in no time at all you've got a simmering cauldron and no shortage of people to give it a good stir as they walk by. Getting and keeping good relations demanded daily application.'

## 6. REAL PROGRESS 1971–1974

The seventies had barely dawned before it became clear that the vast edifice of the South-East Study was founded on erroneous premises. The surge of births in the early sixties did not last. Maybe it was the Pill; maybe it was changes in living. Whatever the cause, the surge peaked in 1962 and as it did so the demographers began to revise downwards their end-of-century population forecasts for south-east England. The effects of the change from boom to bust were astonishing. In 1960 Britain's population was expected to grow by about ten million in forty years. In 1965 it was expected to grow by nearly twenty million in thirty-five years. But by 1975 the Registrar General was foreseeing an increase of less than four million over twenty-five years. The population bubble had burst.

Changes in Population Forecasts 1955–1975: Great Britain				
Year projection made	Base population in previous year	Population projections		
		1980	1990	2000
1955	49.8m	51.7m	51.5m	—
1960	51.1	56.1	58.9	62.0m
1965	53.1	59.6	64.9	72.5
1970	54.3	56.9	60.2	64.0
1975	54.5	54.6	56.4	58.0

Source: Cullingworth<sup>11</sup>.

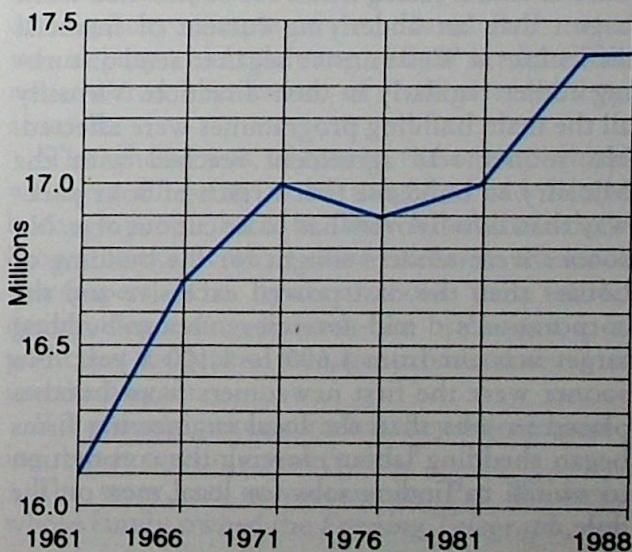
However, as Professor Cullingworth observes in his official history of the new towns, 'once the policy of creating additional new towns was embarked upon it was not easy to change'.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore there was, initially, little doubt about the continuing need for new towns to help people to move out of the great cities. Yet as the

sixties turned into the seventies, ministers at Westminster and councillors in the major cities began to doubt even this proposition.

Research, in particular that done by the Greater London Council in the course of revising its development plan, was producing momentous policy shifts. Previously the GLC had aimed at keeping the 1981 population of the capital down to eight million. Then, just at the time when Peterborough was coming on stream, it began to shift its ground and take the view that London's economy would suffer if, by that date, its population was allowed to fall below 7.3 million. Worse still the council began to worry about the effects on London's social structure of 'the loss of skilled workers moving to the new towns and potential owner-occupiers moving to the outer metropolitan area'.

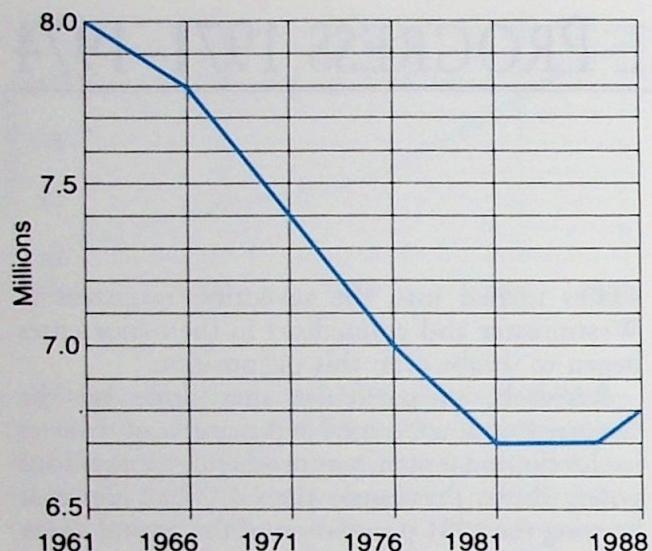
London's county hall, after years of playing the role of big-bosomed mother to its surrounding region, was drying up.

It was these gathering clouds, coupled with



Growth of population in south-east England 1961–1988.

*Decline of population in  
Greater London 1961–1988.*



Treasury concern about the mounting overall cost of the new towns programme, that led to the abandonment in 1969 of the proposed Ipswich expansion. Ed Schoon and his colleagues at Shankland Cox had already taken the Ipswich expansion through public inquiry at the time of the cancellation. Ipswich was thus a still-born new town.

These then were the prevailing conditions as Christopher Higgins and Wyndham Thomas began to get things moving at Peterborough. Yet they were far from the full extent of the difficulties facing them. No sooner had work begun than an underlying current of financial difficulties at Westminster began to send disturbing eddies regularly in their direction. Virtually all the main building programmes were affected. No sooner was agreement reached with the Ministry to build the first stretch of Soke parkway than two flyovers had to be cut out of it. No sooner were tenders sought for the building of houses than the cost proved excessive and the corporation's mid-seventies house-building target was cut from 1,600 to 1,100 a year. No sooner were the first newcomers from London placed in jobs than the local engineering firms began shedding labour, forcing the corporation to switch to finding jobs for local men on the dole.

Managing the flow of jobs was probably the single most difficult task facing the corporation. Jobs were the foundation upon which everything else was built yet they also depended on politically controversial decisions by the Board of Trade in Whitehall. Industrial development certificates (IDCs) were the government's instrument of control. The President of the Board of Trade used them, as a shepherd does his dogs, to drive the industrial sheep away from the lush meadows of south-east England on to the acid moors of Cornwall and the north. Yet he also had to succour the new towns.

Successive governments struggled to make IDCs serve these conflicting objectives. The array of new cities and expansions authorised in the sixties made the conflict more acute. In times of recession, when the dole queues of the north grew longer, the pressure on ministers peaked. Peterborough Development Corporation added to such pressure by lobbying for IDCs to be given automatically to firms in the town and to others which had considered and rejected moving to an 'assisted area'.

Yet worse was to come. The oil price increases of 1973 made the earlier eddies seem like mere ripples. In their wake came inflation, restructuring by Peterborough firms and unemployment. In the six years up to 1974 not only did interest rates double but Whitehall regularly modified the corporation's requests to borrow. For an agency trying to co-ordinate the building of houses, over which it had some control, with growth in the number of jobs, over which it had very little, programming was, to say the least, not easy.

And as if this was not enough, 1974 saw upheaval in local government as the old structure of shire counties and county boroughs gave way to a new one of much bigger counties and, within them, a patchwork of districts. At Peterborough this led to an expansion of the city council's boundaries to take in more than the new town. It also resulted in the replacement of the mini-county of Huntingdon and Peterborough by the large and wealthy Cambridgeshire. For the partnership it meant new faces and rebuilding the understanding and trust established since 1968.

However it is important not to exaggerate the difficulties. Development corporations are extremely effective bodies. They have clear-cut objectives, their job is to build and they get their money from the ample, if not ever-open, purse of Westminster. Furthermore their chief officers, free from day-to-day control, make decisions and get on with things.

And Peterborough did. By the early seventies the corporation was churning out houses and Bretton township was under construction – its houses piped for district heating, its centre distinguished by a huge Sainsbury's. Over at Castor thousands of trees were growing in a nursery while at Peterscourt, the corporation's headquarters, planners were at work on the second township at Orton and on the city centre. The corporation had also started to attract service employers. Two kinds of sites were lined up for them – some at Northminster, a traditional city centre location next to the cathedral, others in suburban parkland at Thorpe Wood. By 1973 Pearl Assurance had opened their computer centre at Thorpe Wood while Thomas Cook, the travel agents, had made a decision to move from Mayfair to an adjacent site.

Another early landmark was the completion at Ravensthorpe of the corporation's first houses, one of which became the home of Michael and Eileen Mulhern, the first new town family. Gerry Burns, the corporation's housing manager, recalled that they were designed by architects who had previously worked at Corby new town in Northamptonshire. 'They came with the plans under their arms. In fact there is a scheme in Corby called Kingswood which, when you look at it, is identical in layout to Ravensthorpe. But Corby has allowed Kingswood to become a difficult-to-let estate, whereas Ravensthorpe is over two-thirds sold to sitting tenants.'

Peterborough architecture was never flashy and the houses designed by the architects from Corby were neat, pitched-roofed, brown-brick buildings arranged around small greens and, in some cases, play patches for toddlers. By the standards of the eighties the houses were



*The corporation's tree nursery at Castor.*

plain, even severe, but the windows were well-shaped and positioned. They did not look in the least like Georgian houses but they had that kind of simplicity. Simple or not, David Bath, who was deputy chief planning officer at the time, remembered the storm of controversy they aroused.

'The scheme was, of course, the one by which we were all going to be judged – and Peterborough people hated it. They hated these dark brown bricks. It was a *cause célèbre* in the local newspapers. The hysteria about these dark, dreary, depressing, barrack-like bricks got to a point that the general manager promised never to use them again.'

'I was never quite sure what they were expecting, but it certainly wasn't this.'

The story, set in motion by Pat Winfrey, whose family owned the *Evening Telegraph*, ran



*Ravensthorpe: the first houses.*

for several weeks. It was characteristic of the persistent needling the corporation got from the press in its early days. Newspapers are, at the best of times, impatient animals and those in Peterborough may have felt they had been waiting too long for something to happen. The presence in the town of three different papers all after the same readers may have been influential too.

The episode of the brown bricks was a storm in a media teacup. The Ravensthorpe houses were a sign of real progress. Within a short time, they and others at Woodston would produce over a thousand lettings. Thousands more houses would follow. The date of completion of the first thousand houses was June 1973. Just over four years later the corporation passed the 5,000 mark

and by June 1985 it had completed 10,000 houses.

In the thirties, Frank Pick had been, unofficially, working for the housebuilders who turned Middlesex from a rural into an urban county. As he extended the Underground out towards the new Tudorbethan estates of Stanmore and Uxbridge so he pasted up his 'Come out to Metroland' posters and, according to Professor Peter Hall, used the famous map of the Underground to deceive people into thinking it was less far out than it was. How, in the seventies, could Londoners be persuaded to venture almost as far as the Wash?

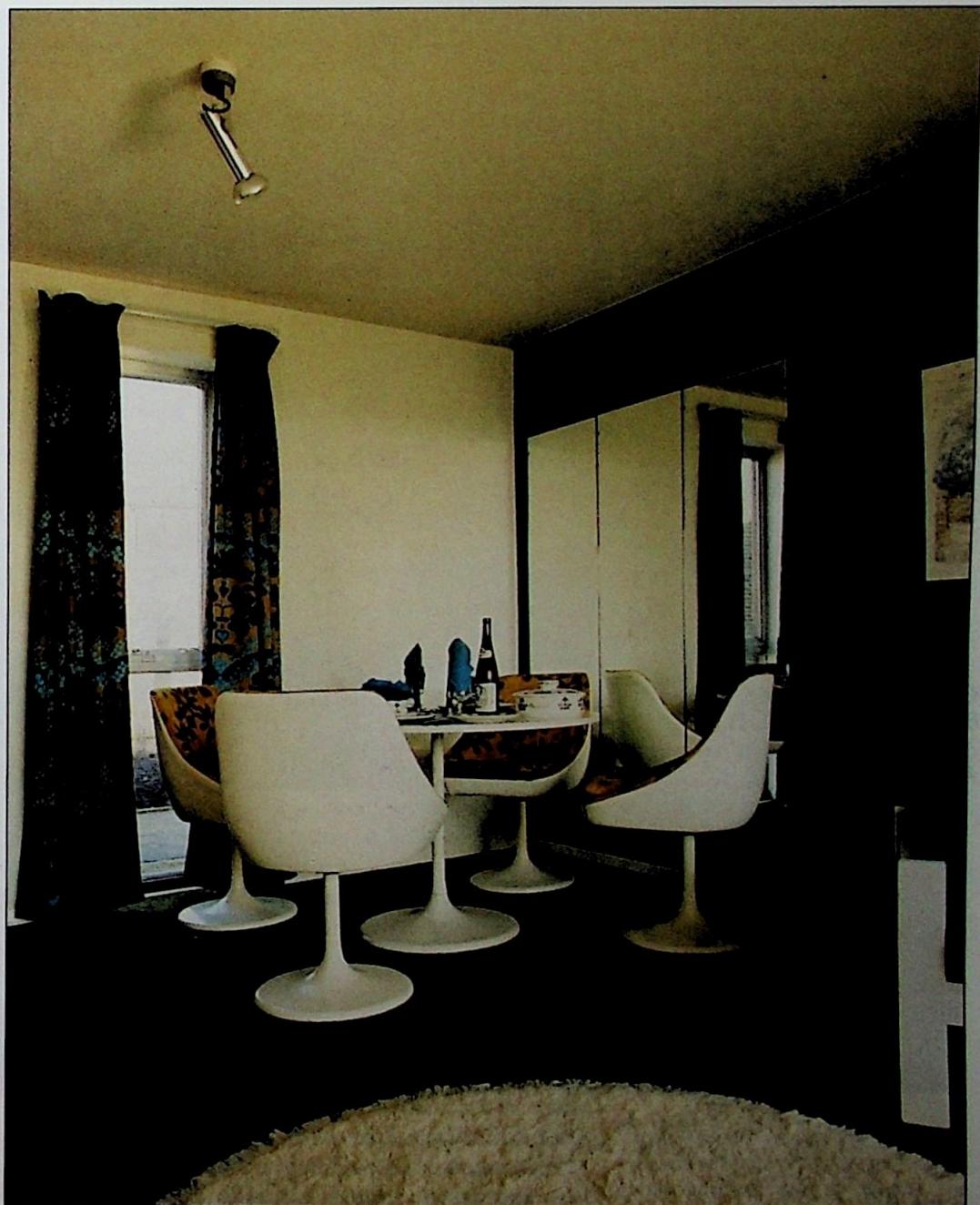
Higgins and Thomas had started working on this problem in 1968 when they contacted councillors and officials at Islington, Haringey and

Lambeth. And back in Peterborough local employers had contacted them. The engineering firms were worried that incoming London firms, offering metropolitan pay rates, would poach their skilled machinists. Higgins, always the pacifier, offered them first refusal of the incoming Londoners. And as work got under way on the first houses at Ravensthorpe, local firms were surveyed and found to have about a thousand job vacancies. Filling those jobs with Londoners promised to get the new town off to a good start.

It fell to Gerry Burns to go around the employers again when the builders at Ravensthorpe were getting ready to hand over the first of the neat, brown-brick houses. Burns, a soft-voiced Scot who came to Peterborough from housing management in Glasgow and Brighton, was not prepared for what he found. Unemployment had risen to 4.1 per cent, double the rate during the preceding decade, and the thousand jobs had shrunk to fifty. Something more was needed to fill the houses at Ravensthorpe. However, although Peter Pan Playthings, the first company to set up in a corporation-built factory, did not arrive until 1972, the number of jobs was increasing. Notable amongst them were corporation and contractors' staff.

The corporation's official source of Londoners was the Industrial Selection Scheme (ISS) run by the Greater London Council. Londoners with skills could register and be notified about job vacancies in new and expanding towns via hook-ups between labour exchanges. The ISS was used by the corporation but, as it had a reputation for being slow, bureaucratic and ineffective, the board decided to try its own 'weaver to wearer' approach. Lambeth was selected as the guinea-pig.

The venue was a housing advice centre adjacent to the town hall in Brixton. Lambeth was then a Conservative-controlled borough and the chairman of the housing committee was John Major, later to be Member of Parliament for Huntingdon (and part of the new town) as well as First Secretary to the Treasury in Margaret Thatcher's

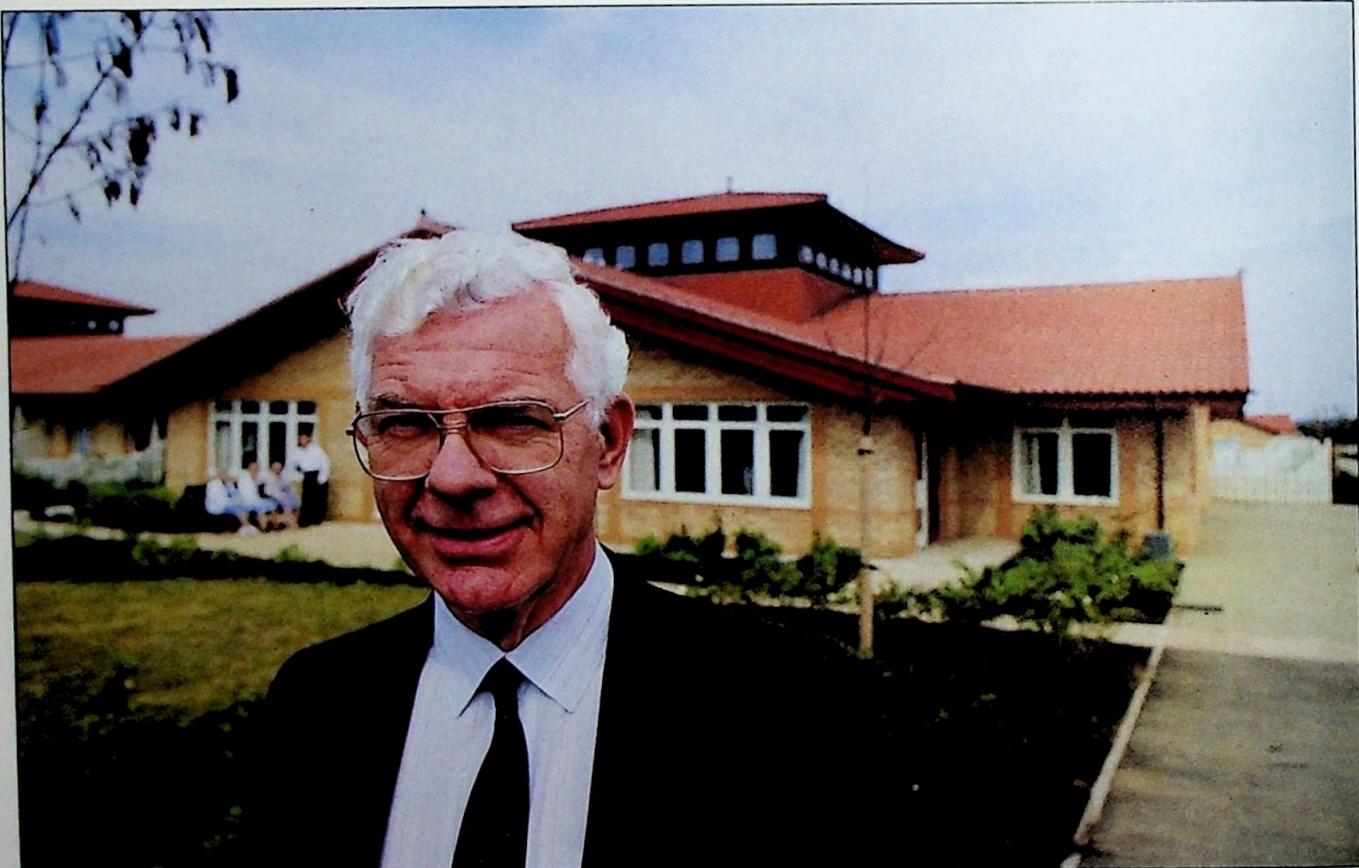


third government. According to Gerry Burns, Lambeth had opened the first housing advice centre in the country. 'It was a very attractive place. We took it over for a week although we were a bit embarrassed that we had only fifty jobs.' Publicity for Peterborough's presence consisted of a snowstorm of leaflets dropped on

Ravensthorpe: inside the show house - the dining area.

## THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT

Gerry Burns, the corporation's housing manager, outside Napier Place sheltered housing, 1988.



GLC and Lambeth tenants and advertisements in the local papers. The response was astonishing.

'When we got to the town hall for the public meeting on the first night we couldn't get in. It was jam-packed and people were overspilling into the entrance and down the stairs. We abandoned all the plans we had for a structured meeting and Wyndham, being the showman he is, took the wandering mike and went up on the stage and ad-libbed. He had them in the palm of his hand about Peterborough.'

The week of interviewing that followed was no less successful than the meeting. The corporation's 'supermarket' approach to housing assistance worked. By having Peterborough, Lambeth and GLC housing officials and labour exchange representatives at adjoining tables, tasks that took the ISS weeks, months or never were completed in minutes.

Within eight weeks thirty-one people had been placed in jobs in Peterborough and a further

twenty-five were being introduced to likely employers. In addition to this no fewer than 496 families had registered a wish to move to Peterborough and after an item on a family moving to the new town was shown by Eamonn Andrews on his peak viewing Thames TV show, the corporation received 950 letters.

A clear picture of the poor housing endured by many inner Londoners emerges from the corporation's *Lambeth to Peterborough* report. Twenty-two of the thirty-one households moving to the new town lived in privately rented flats and of those only two had their own bathrooms; nine had no bathroom at all.

Analysis of the interviews with the 500 odd families wishing to move to Peterborough revealed that half lived in overcrowded homes. As for incomes - eight out of ten earned between £15 and £30 a week while their rents were in the



£5 to £6 range. Corporation rents in Peterborough at that time were about £5. What did they think about Peterborough? Half of them had never heard of it.

The Brixton week also made clear that the problem identified by Douglas Jay in his letter to Richard Crossman back in 1965 was a real one. New towns, with their first-a-job-then-a-house policy, found it hard to help the poorest Londoners. This unfortunate truth struck Gerry Burns most forcibly.

'These jolly, fat women would come in trailing four or five kids and say, "I would like to move to Peterborough. I've got lousy housing conditions". And we would say, "Sorry but you must have a job - you must have a skilled job". I felt a bit embarrassed that we were creating this groundswell of hope and then, having created it, would have to say to them, "You've got to be a skilled person and you've got to fit one of these fifty jobs".

'The people who were in desperately bad

*Only two of the twenty-two households moving to the new town from privately rented flats in Lambeth had their own bathroom: nine had no bathroom at all. (Rex Features)*

*Living in a one room flat.* (BBC Hulton Picture Library)



housing conditions just couldn't get there. It was the people who had some skill who could move.'

For Burns, Lambeth week pinpointed the problem for the corporation. The ISS did not work. 'They were chasing their tails; they were only moving bits of paper; they never matched people very well.' It was necessary to bypass them by means of a direct approach and the week in Lambeth had shown it could be done '... but the overkill was bad. You were raising people's expectations and couldn't meet them'.

The fears of the GLC that inner London was becoming a sink of poverty were, sooner or later, transmitted to the London boroughs and they then disconnected themselves from the new towns. They concluded that not only were they losing people with skills, but that the houses thus emptied were not even being filled by those who had been left behind. As Burns put it: 'What was

happening was that the Irish boat train was coming in with another load of unskilled labourers who took up that space. So the boroughs said to us: "Your net contribution to our welfare is nil. It's negative really. You are taking our best people away and the space left by them is being filled by more unskilled people".'

These same concerns emerged from a consultation paper on the new towns published by the Department of the Environment in December 1974. After describing the effects of the first-a-job-then-a-house policy, the paper said: 'But to allow the new towns to beggar the cities they serve by taking only the relatively fortunate members of society and leaving the least fortunate behind would be likely to increase rather than diminish the social problems of those cities.' The document went on to suggest that the new towns should start taking commuters. Did Whitehall really believe that the poor of Stepney or Toxteth were going to be able to afford the

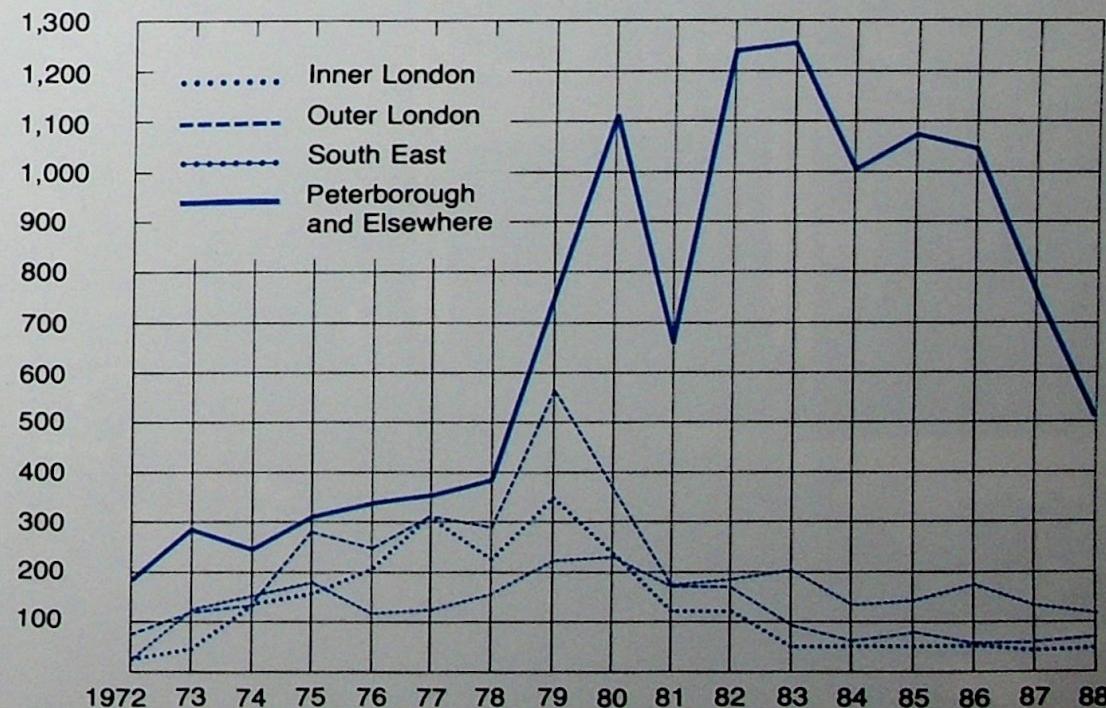
fares to and from Harlow or Runcorn, let alone Peterborough?

Official fears about the accumulation of poverty in the inner cities did not, however, dry up the flow of Londoners arriving in Peterborough. People still heard about the town on the grape-vine or via radio advertisements aimed by the corporation at London employers. They would drive up at the weekend to have a look. Most of them had skills and reasonable homes although some wanted to swap a flat in a London tower block for a house with a garden elsewhere. Londoners also continued to move to Peterborough with mobile firms such as Molins, makers of cigarette manufacturing machines, who left Deptford to set up in temporary quarters on the Westwood industrial estate in 1973.

The Industrial Selection Scheme continued to be cumbersome but no way could be found to improve it so Burns took three London-based housing visitors on to his staff. They ensured that some ill-housed London families got to Peterborough. Wyndham Thomas put the issue in perspective.

'It needed an act of will on the part of the corporation to do something about those people. Peterborough was one of the very few places that took that decision. In other new towns they took the view that they would house those who filled the jobs. That was quite different. Peterborough went further. But despite the fact that we made a big and sustained effort - it was still a relatively small contribution to the problem.'

TOP: Tenants housed yearly by the corporation.  
RIGHT: Origins of corporation tenants.





## 7. TOWNSHIPS IN A PARK

'People will lead a new kind of city life: easy and delightful journeys within their city region to the new and old centres of education, culture and recreation; homes in great variety clustered among the woodlands and rivers; great parklands within the fabric of the city.'

The preface to Tom Hancock's plan made clear that the new Peterborough was to be about delight, variety and openness. It was not going to be a tight medieval knot of buildings in the style of Scotland's newest new town. 'I thought Cumbernauld was not the way forward and that, without being more definite than that, we must look to the idea of a multi-centred, loose-knit, city-region', Hancock told an audience of town planners in 1988.

The sixties saw a ferment in thinking about cities. Futurism was fashionable and developed countries were said to be on the threshold of 'the post-industrial age'. The idea of the 'global village' was born and Professor Melvin Webber of the University of California, the guru of Milton Keynes, extrapolated American and British productiveness and peered with astonishment into the cornucopias of wealth he had exposed. Mario Salvatori, another futurist, said, 'We are... witnessing the beginning of a situation in which work is no longer a right but a status symbol.'<sup>21</sup>

It was heady, Sunday colour-section stuff. A more down-to-earth view was that the finite, even walled, city portrayed in Renaissance paintings (and its Victorian mill-and-cottages successor) was being replaced by a city composed of both town and country and bound together by the telephone and the car. It was a view that underpinned the proposals for city regions in John (later Lord Redcliffe-) Maud's Royal Commission on Local Government. It can be

seen too in Graeme Shankland's expansion plan for Ipswich – a chain of towns and parks stretching no less than twenty-five miles up and down the Gipping valley and the Orwell estuary.

Tom Hancock's contribution to this kind of thinking was five hypothetical arrangements for the new Peterborough, only one of which gathered the new town into a continuous extrusion of the old city. All the others involved looser groupings of development while one of them dotted it for fifteen miles along the Great North Road towards Huntingdon.

After testing these hypotheses using a 'planning balance sheet' devised by his associate Professor Nathaniel Lichfield, Hancock plumped for four townships, each of about thirty thousand inhabitants, and drew the boundary of the new city around them.

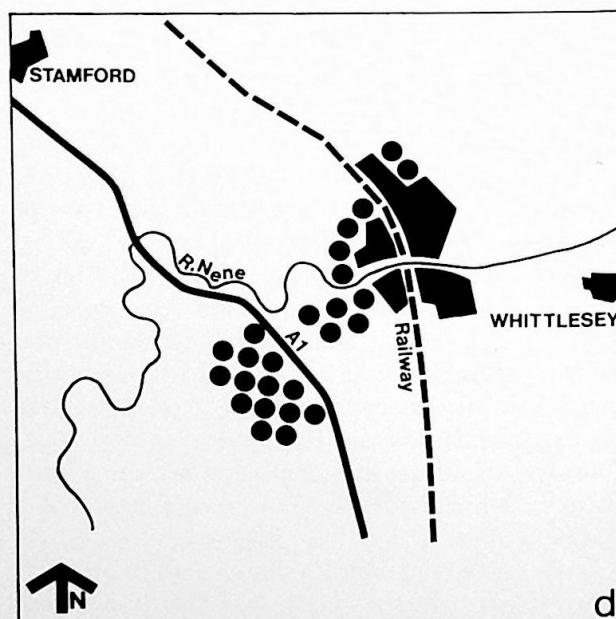
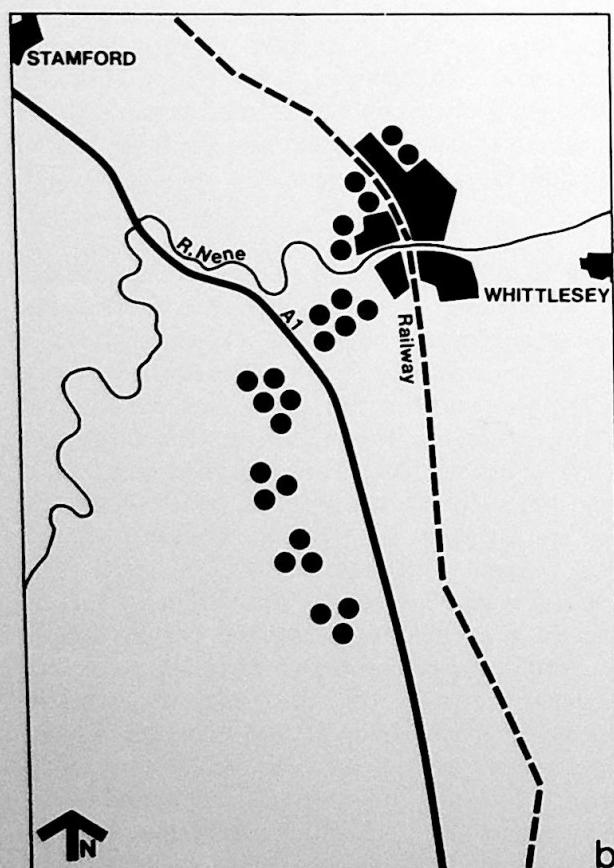
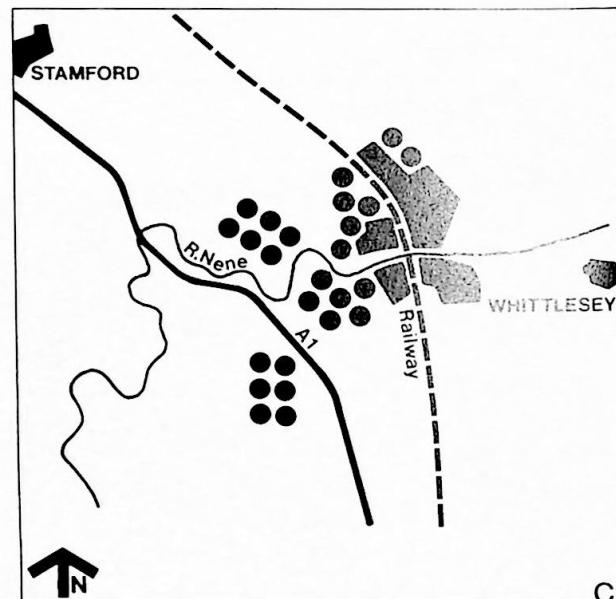
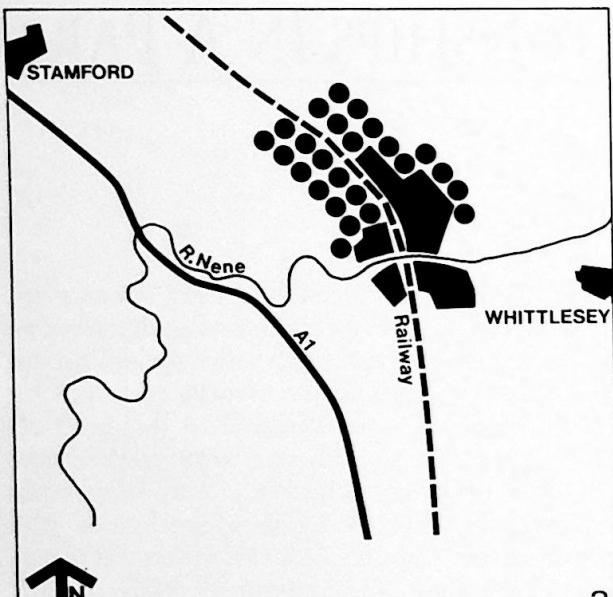
Hancock's preferred solution came closer than any previous new town to realising Ebenezer Howard's idea of a 'social city'. It was a cluster of settlements set in parkland and closely linked to a mother city containing department stores, a central reference library, the town hall, lawyers' offices and all the components of a big city centre. Only Harlow, on which Hancock had worked with Sir Frederick Gibberd, shared such a form – and then at a reduced scale.

The site of Harlow was some folds of exceptionally beautiful Essex country. Sir Frederick Gibberd, architect, artist and landscape architect, arranged the town with four quarters each for about 14,000 residents. These quarters, which were in turn subdivided into neighbourhoods, were, as Howard had envisaged, separated from one another by parkland – in Harlow's case pretty wooded valleys.

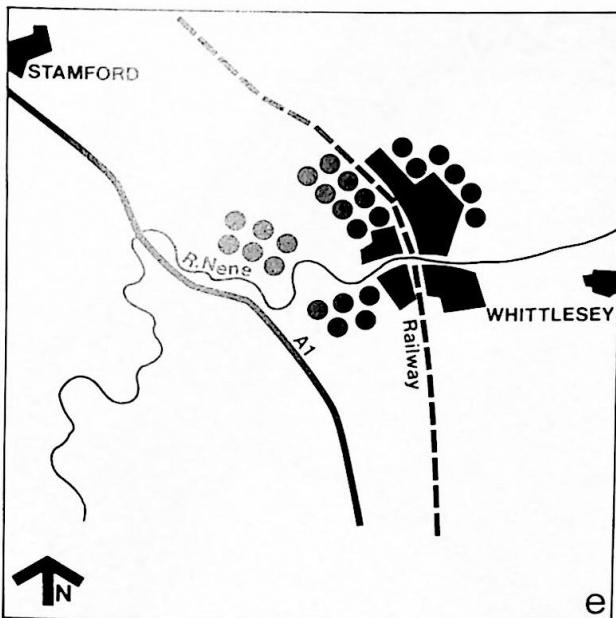
OPPOSITE: Orton township: the central square with 'Fire', a sculpture in mild steel by David Annesley.

## THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT

Hancock's five hypothetical arrangements for the new town: a) as Henry Wells had foreseen it; b) as Professor Peter Hall suggested; c and d) both with some development carried across to the west of the A1 highway, and, e) with four townships close to the cathedral city as Hancock finally proposed.



The Essex new town was thus a social city in miniature and in Gibberd's description of it can be detected the outline of Peterborough's parks and parkways. The 'broad flow of landscape in between the groups of buildings gives people a chance to drive and walk about the town in natural surroundings. It stops the town closing



into one vast mass of buildings and it gives a fine contrast between the work of man and the work of God.'

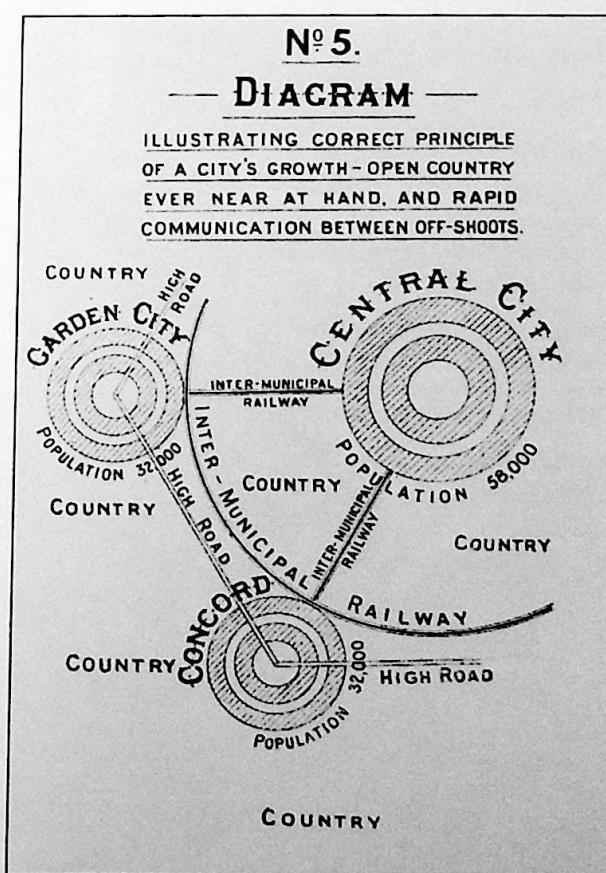
Harlow, like its contemporary new towns, was made up of neighbourhoods all of which looked to a primary school, a shop and a pub. Hancock's plan for Peterborough put more stress on the township although the corporation brought neighbourhoods back. Wyndham Thomas thought that through them 'a sense of community, of belonging, of shared interest with neighbours would be most readily felt and fostered, and that the stability, sense of common responsibility and personal fulfilment this would generate would contribute to the common good...'

He saw this as '... a simple philosophy but of profound importance for western societies, where man and his family are increasingly dominated and alienated by great concentrations of people and buildings and the vast organisations of industry, commerce and government.'<sup>22</sup>

Volumes have been written about the concept of the neighbourhood. It certainly makes sense in physical planning terms as the catchment area of a primary school and a minimarket. But is it something more? Is it, as Wyndham Thomas

thought, the cradle of community, the building block of society at large? And, more to the point, if a town is arranged physically in neighbourhoods, is the emergence of togetherness more likely?

Many people feel in their guts that community is engendered by the careful grouping of towns – even if the evidence is not all with them. Did not Willmott and Young find a flourishing neighbourhood spirit in the grotty, crowded, undifferentiated back streets of Bethnal Green?<sup>23</sup> Did not Terence Lee, the psychologist, find that no two neighbours in Cambridge perceived their neighbourhood as the same?<sup>24</sup> And what about the common observation that propinquity is as likely to lead to antagonism as amity? Certainly this was John Clare's experience at his birthplace of Helpston, half-way between Peterborough and Stamford. Neighbourhood for him was synony-



Ebenezer Howard's diagram showing the 'correct principle of a city's growth' – a central city adjoined by two separate garden cities each of 32,000 inhabitants. From *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, 1902.

# BRETTON TOWNSHIP



- RESIDENTIAL AREAS BRETTON ONLY
- OTHER RESIDENTIAL AREAS
- OPEN/RECREATION SPACE BRETTON ONLY
- OPEN/RECREATION SPACE OTHER AREAS
- WOODLAND/TREE BELTS
- TOWNSHIP CENTRE
- LOCAL CENTRES
- NEW INDUSTRY
- ESTABLISHED INDUSTRY
- SCHOOLS
- PS PRIMARY SCHOOL
- CS COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL
- SS SPECIAL SCHOOL
- PRIMARY ROADS/PARKWAYS
- SECONDARY/DISTRIBUTOR ROADS
- CYCLEWAYS/FOOTPATHS
- DESIGNATED AREA BOUNDARY

0 100 200 300 400 500 metres  
0 100 200 300 400 500 yards

MAP SCALE



*The plan for Bretton,  
Peterborough's first  
township.*

mous with small-minded bitchiness<sup>25</sup>.

'I hate the very name of troubrous man  
Who did and does me all the harm he can.'

Never mind. Romance and mythology are as present in our perceptions of towns as of everything else. No doubt too the pros and cons of neighbourhoods were hotly debated at Peterscourt. Meanwhile there was work to be done. Decisions were taken to modify Hancock's township proposals. At Bretton the long skinny shape of the site did not allow for much alteration but the curvature of the spine road was altered. It was looped back towards the city in the form of a shepherd's crook. This increased the number of people who would be able to walk and bicycle to the shops without having to cross the road. Paston was chopped up and treated as 'a series of neighbourhoods built successively through the expansion programme'.

Linear planning was killed off too. The master plan faithfully reflected Wyndham Thomas's thinking: 'The Development Corporation will not commit itself to any formal principle for the internal structure of each township in advance of the layout design... In particular the rigid linear form of development proposed for every township has been drastically modified at Bretton, and is most unlikely to be adopted for the later townships.' The townships would instead have an individuality stemming from differences in their sites and 'the need for economy in capital investment'.

For Wyndham Thomas the master plan was more than a blueprint. It was public relations. It was no place for theory, least of all the debatable theory of linear planning. This was the analysis of Ed Schoon, the corporation's first planning officer.

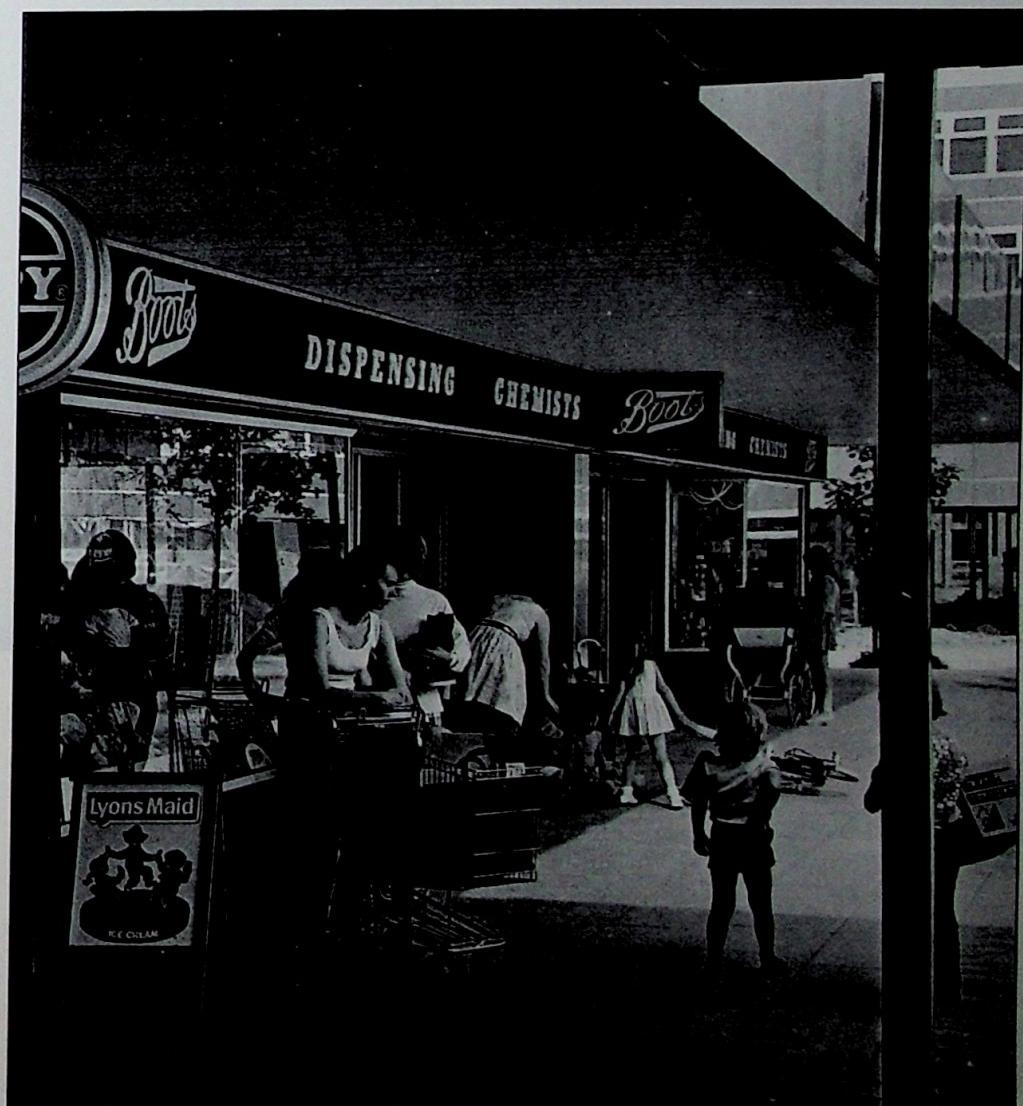
'That is why... in my opinion, he overstated the differences between the master plan and the Hancock plan. In fact you will find the essence of the Hancock plan underlying the master plan.'

New data from the Registrar General led to other changes to the townships. Households

were shrinking. This meant that although the number of houses foreseen by Hancock remained much the same, the number of people forecast to live in them was falling. The master plan accordingly gave the townships populations of 20,000 to 30,000 and not the latter figure alone as Hancock had envisaged.

Bretton, the first township, covered 900 acres of dense woods and farmland lying between the city council's Westwood estate and the broad acres of Milton Park. It was expected that building would start in 1970 and go on for five years by

*Bretton centre: 'It doesn't matter too much about the men. They are away most of the time. Women and children first.'*





*Corporation-built houses in Bretton.*

*OPPOSITE: On the footways in Bretton.*

which time some 5,400 houses would be occupied by about 20,000 new Peterborians. It was intended that just under two in five of the houses would be built for sale – though the sale of the corporation's rented houses was foreseen too – and that heat and hot water would be piped to all the houses from a central boiler. Within the township there would be five neighbourhoods, every one with its pub, shop and community room.

Wyndham Thomas knew exactly the kind of place he wanted Bretton to be: 'Women and children first.' He had read of this principle in a

critique of the County of London Plan by Lewis Mumford. 'Make the house and its environment good for women and children and it will be good by any conceivable criterion. It doesn't matter too much about the men. They are away most of the time. Women and children first. I hammered that home.'

Bretton is distinguished by its large park and its lush woodlands but it did not work particularly well. Ed Schoon reckoned that the spine road, started as dual-carriageway and then cut to a single to reduce its dominance, divides the township and that the centre ended up as a rather

fragmented place. 'It didn't really hang together in my view.'

Sainsbury's was a major cause of the fragmentation even though getting it was a coup. Bernard Brook-Partridge, who replaced Clare Mansell on the board as a link with the Greater London Council, was involved in the deal. He recalled that Bretton was all mud, sweat and tears when Tim Sainsbury visited it. 'We offered him two sites . . . the old trick intended to push him into deciding then and there.' Tim Sainsbury was evidently impressed by what he was shown. Not long after his firm decided to build its first 'north of Watford' supermarket at Bretton.

One unique characteristic of Bretton was the communal boiler-house which supplied heat and hot water to the entire township. District heating, as it was called, was fashionable in the early seventies and Ken Hutton, the chief engineer, persuaded the board of its merits.

The standard for public housing heating at that time (defined by the Parker-Morris committee) was sixty-five degrees Fahrenheit in downstairs rooms – and less upstairs. Ken Hutton's proposal for Bretton promised seventy degrees everywhere and unlimited hot baths as well. 'It offered a much better standard at a lower cost and we felt that was good for those who would live in Bretton, particularly the elderly, infirm and less well-off.'

It was also going to be the most extensive district heating system in the country. There were boilers heating larger numbers of homes in some other towns but they served tower blocks of flats and the mains were much shorter. At Bretton, Ken Hutton planned to have seventy-five miles of high-pressure pipes serving nearly 4,000 houses both public and private as well as schools, shops, factories and offices.

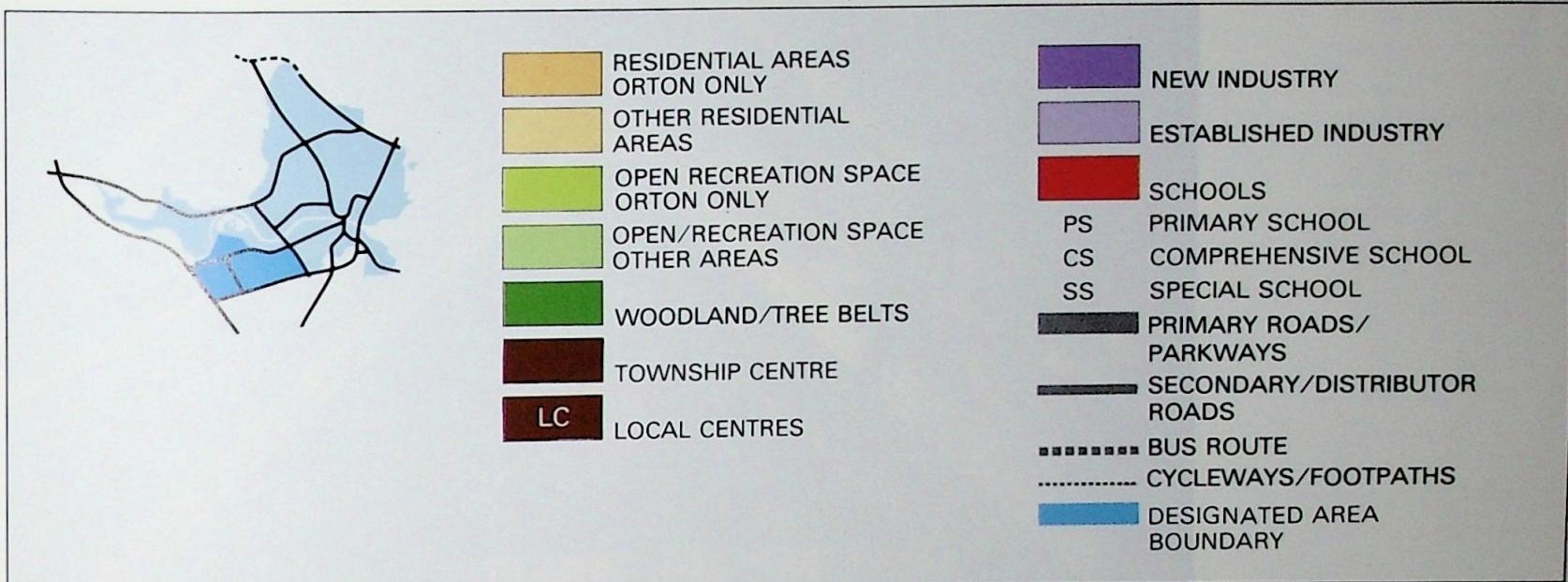
The secret ingredient was the flickering blue flame of North Sea gas, the first therms of which had, not long before, been brought ashore at Bacton in Norfolk. In 1971 the corporation negotiated a contract with British Gas to supply the boilers with fuel at 2.5 pence per therm for five years rising thereafter by 4 per cent annually for another five years. Hutton knew the fuel price





# ORTON TOWNSHIP

*The plan for Orton township –  
on which construction began in  
1974.*



was critical. 'Only on the basis of this contract was the scheme viable.'

By 1981, when the corporation was still paying only 3.2 pence a therm, other customers were paying nearly eleven times more. But Bretton's holiday from inflation was brief. It proved impossible to negotiate a new contract at a price acceptable to the residents. The gap was too great to be bridged. Furthermore there was no reserve in the account because government price controls during the seventies had made it impossible to increase charges. The account was also overloaded by the high interest payments characteristic of the same period.

Ken Hutton and his colleagues looked at a variety of ways of getting costs down to an acceptable level but all to no avail. 'No solution was cheaper than grasping the nettle and replacing the central boiler plant with individual gas boilers in all the houses and other buildings.

'We eventually closed the system down after it had been in use for fourteen years. I was sad. We had mastered the teething problems and it was working well, but it had been defeated by gas pricing.' The conversion took two years and cost £2.9 million. Not long after the boiler-house, once occupied by the biggest gas boilers in the

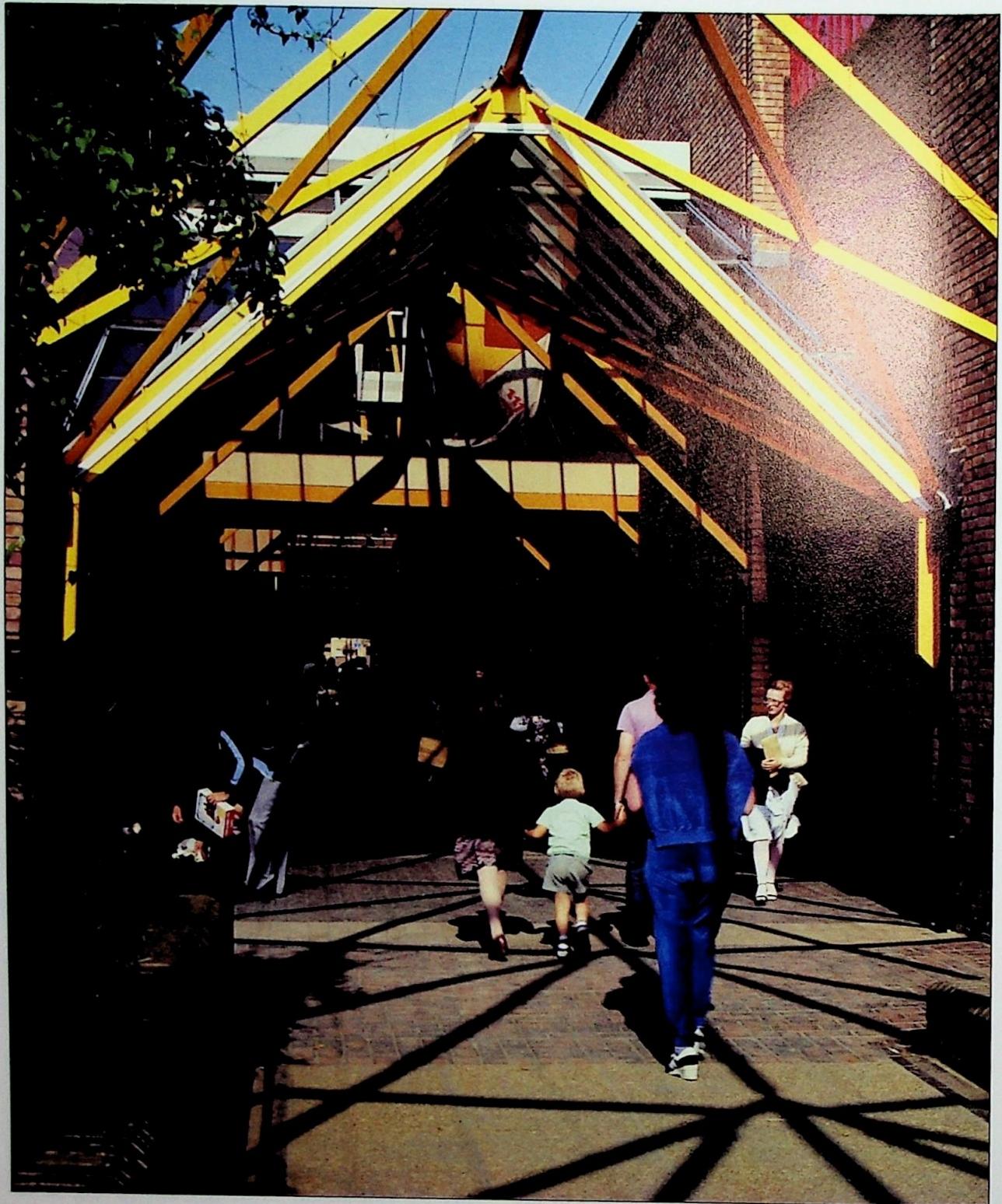
country, became a Bejam freezer centre. District heating was not chosen for any of the other townships.

**O**rton, the second township, bears little resemblance to Bretton. After considering the lie of the land and the lessons to be learnt from Bretton, Ed Schoon and his team turned the spine into a route for buses and ran the main town road, by then called a 'distributor', as much as possible along the outer edge of the township. This provided good sites for houses between the road and the existing villages of Orton Waterville and Orton Longueville. It also minimised the barriers for residents wanting to walk or bicycle across to the Nene valley to the north. Schoon felt he had left his mark.

'Orton was very much more public transport oriented than Bretton, and this is probably the thing I influenced most.'

Orton was bigger than Bretton and embraced two existing villages with about 3,500 inhabitants. After 7,200 houses had been built there, the total population would be 30,000, or about the size of King's Lynn. Orton's centre would therefore be substantial – though not so big as to

THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT



*One of the entrances  
to Orton centre.*



*David Bath (left) presents a folio of photographs to Alfred Savage, president and Tom Martin, chairman of Werrington Neighbourhood Council.*

threaten the corporation's ambitions for the city centre.

There were to be six neighbourhoods and half of all the houses would be for sale. The accommodation would range from 'flats for single people to large houses built to their own architects' designs by owners wanting and able to afford a distinctive house and garden in spacious surroundings'. The detached villas would have sites as big as a quarter of an acre but on the average private houses in Orton would be ten to the acre. Houses for rent would be less varied and average twelve to the acre. The first families moved into Orton in January 1976. They bought 123 semi-detached Bryant Homes each costing £8,500.

When the master plan was reviewed in 1977 it was decided that 'reserve land' next to Orton

Wistow, the westernmost neighbourhood, should be developed as a 'science park'. This reduced by 200 the houses to be built. When combined with the effect of a continuing fall in household sizes, Orton's final population worked out at only about 22,000.

Paston was different again from Bretton and Orton. Ed Schoon explained that this stemmed from the local conditions. 'It almost became a different exercise – of not building a separate township but of grafting communities on to the existing town. So again it was the site conditions that tended to point the way forward.'

Site conditions also dictated a change in Paston's name to Werrington, the northernmost village in the new town. Alfred Savage, a resident

## THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT

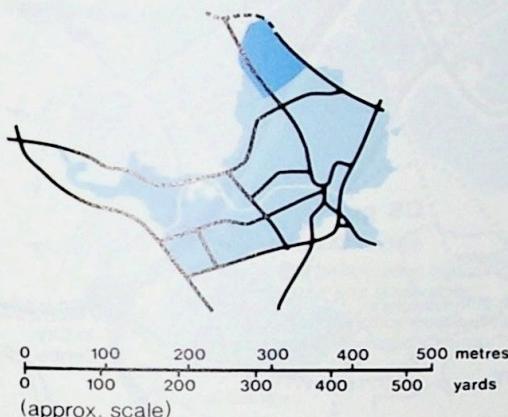


*The plan for Werrington township on which construction began in 1979.*

of Werrington and an engineer with Brotherhood's, was the 'site condition'. He told Wyndham Thomas that he would support the plan for Paston provided that the name of the old village of Werrington was perpetuated and that the corporation undertook to parley with the

residents. He got his way on both counts. The northern township was called Werrington (Gunthorpe and Paston, the two southern neighbourhoods, were treated as appendages of the existing city) and Savage became chairman of Werrington Neighbourhood Council.

# WERRINGTON TOWNSHIP



[Yellow Box]	RESIDENTIAL AREAS WERRINGTON ONLY	[Blue Box]	ESTABLISHED INDUSTRY
[Light Yellow Box]	OTHER RESIDENTIAL AREAS	[Red Box]	SCHOOLS
[Light Green Box]	OPEN/RECREATION SPACE WERRINGTON ONLY	PS	PRIMARY SCHOOL
[Dark Green Box]	OPEN/RECREATION SPACE OTHER AREAS	CS	COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL
[Dark Green Box]	WOODLAND/TREE BELTS		
[Brown Box]	TOWNSHIP CENTRE		
[Brown Box]	LC LOCAL CENTRES		
[Purple Box]	NEW INDUSTRY		
		[Dark Grey Box]	PRIMARY ROADS/ PARKWAYS
		[Medium Grey Box]	SECONDARY/ DISTRIBUTOR ROADS
		[Light Grey Box]	LOCAL ROADS
		[Dotted Line]	BUS ONLY ROUTE
		[Dashed Line]	CYCLEWAYS/FOOTPATHS
		[Blue Box]	DESIGNATED AREA BOUNDARY

Although Werrington was grafted on to an existing village it included over 3,000 houses and was a substantial township in its own right. Experience gained at Bretton and Orton was ploughed into the design of its neighbourhoods but road traffic was handled in new ways.

To the east of Werrington lies Car Dyke, a Roman canal, and beyond that arrow-straight roads cut across the fens towards Thorney and Crowland. David Bath recalled that Werrington's designers wanted to echo this geometry in a formal pattern of avenues. 'But the layout had to ensure that these didn't become corridors for the biting winds that sweep across the fens.' The design of the township was also affected by its smallness. Separate routes for cars, buses and bicycles would have been too expensive. Sharing the roads was necessary.

The placing of Werrington's centre and comprehensive school (which included a sports and leisure centre) was a major issue. Should the two be put side-by-side or separated? Some believed that the close-coupling achieved at Orton had led to rowdyism amongst the shops. Others believed this problem to be exaggerated and outweighed

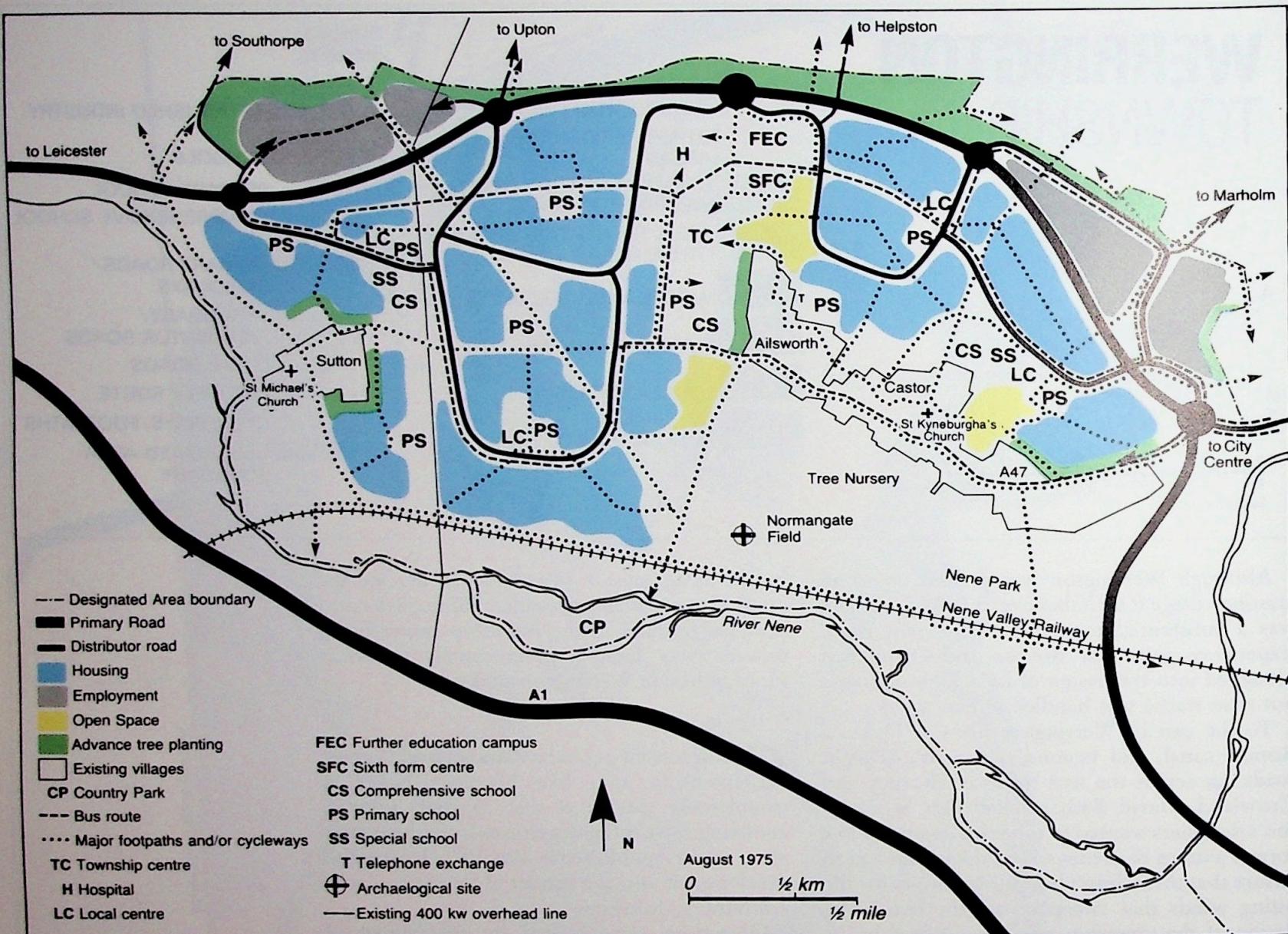
by the advantages of proximity. In the end the proximity argument prevailed although a compromise resulted in the township centre being moved away from a commercially attractive location beside Werrington parkway.

**C**astor turned out to be Peterborough's ghost township and, like Hamlet's father, a troublesome spectre at that. A draft scheme, involving substantial departures from the master plan, was first published in May 1975. It extended development into the hamlet of Sutton in a way not hitherto foreseen.

Objections were lodged by the hamlet of Sutton and the villages of Castor and Ailsworth and produced in turn a split in the county council as local councillors sided with their electors. The corporation's annual report for 1975 said: 'it was a matter of regret . . . that, for the first time, our proposals had to be submitted without the County Council's support'.

The residents of Sutton, Castor and Ailsworth saw in the corporation's revised plan an opportunity to reassert the opposition they had voiced

## THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT



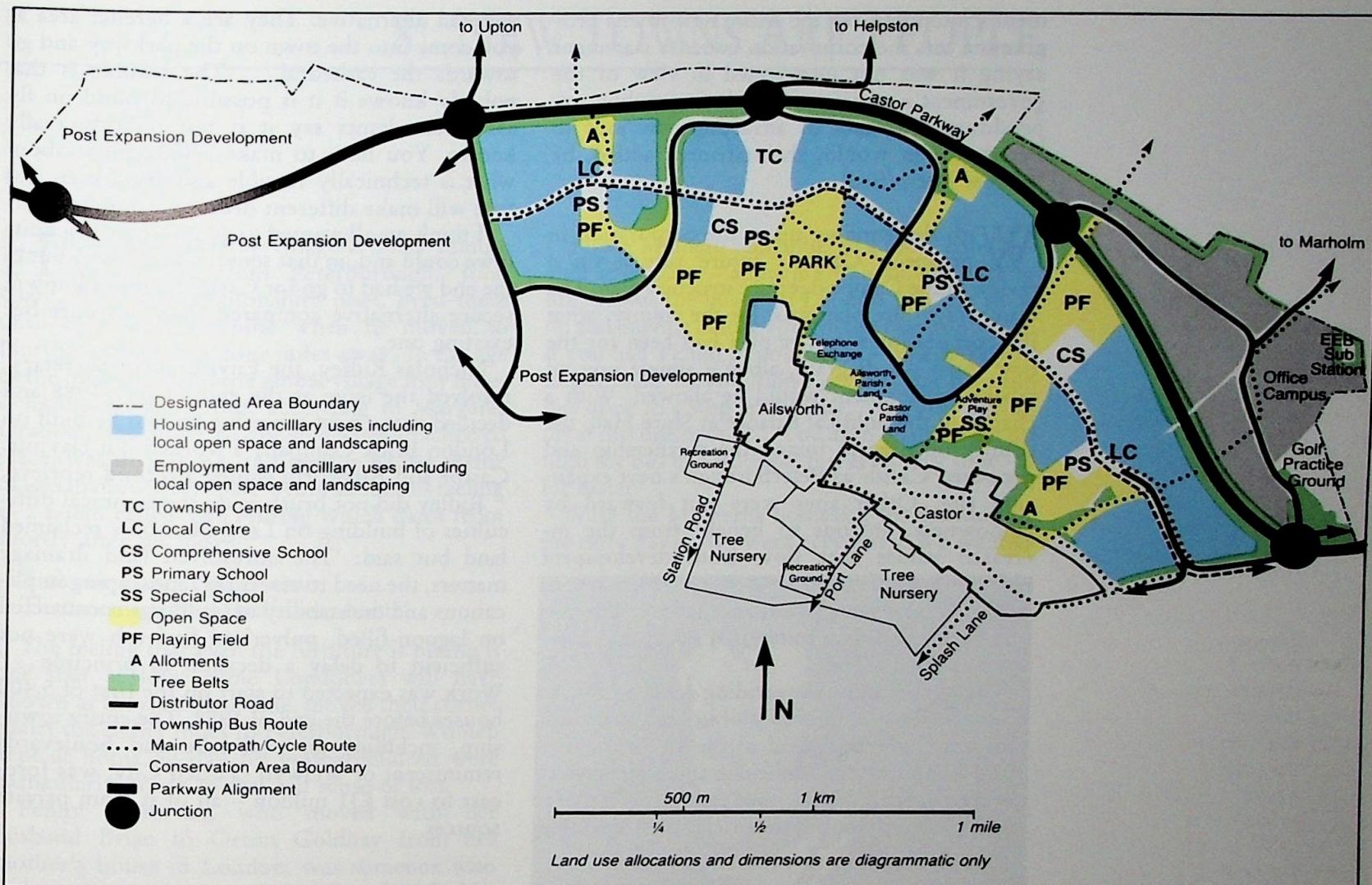
*The Western Sector Outline Plan: the 1975 scheme for Castor township. Sutton is at the far western end.*

when the boundaries for the new town were first announced. Like other villagers elsewhere they did not want to lose their identity. Castor and Ailsworth may have become Peterborough sputniks, but their residents saw that as a fate infinitely preferable to submergence in the new town.

A 1975 plan for Castor deployed 9,600 houses to the south of a parkway bypass for the old

villages. A government review of the new towns programme delayed the plan and it then fell foul of Peter Shore's 1977 decision to cut Peterborough's population target. The corporation then produced a revised plan for 4,000 houses.

Throughout 1978 the villagers tried to frighten the new plan away. Opponents of it said that with Peterborough's population target scaled down by 20,000, the fourth township was no longer



needed. This proposition was supported by passions such as only a parish pump issue can generate. In one press report, Arthur Holmes, vice-chairman of Castor Parish Council, said: 'If we get these vandals and under-privileged coming from the pitholes of Liverpool and the slums of London, they will kick hell out of this village...'. When he went on to say that '...there are loads of other areas crying out for the expansion - like Yaxley and Thorney', inter-village rivalries boiled over.

The corporation, the city council and officers of the county council all tried to explain that,

notwithstanding the decision to stop expansion, Castor's houses would be needed by the city's 'natural growth', in other words the children of existing Peterborough residents.

A public inquiry into the modified Castor plan was held in February 1979 but the outcome was not made known until after the election of Mrs Thatcher's Conservative government. Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine rejected the plan in September 1980 and later instructed the corporation to redraw the boundaries of the new town to exclude Castor township.

The decision was a harbinger of the govern-

*The revised and reduced plan for Castor submitted to the Secretary of State in 1978.*

ment's intentions for the entire new towns programme but the corporation issued a statement saying it was not unexpected in view of the government's policies for reducing public expenditure. The task of attracting new jobs to Peterborough would, the statement added, be 'further intensified'.

**W**ith the winding up of the corporation in prospect, Castor's future turned on a review of the Cambridgeshire structure plan. The Cambridgeshire plan was, for the county, what the corporation's master plan had been for the new town – a diagram, albeit a simple one, of where development would be allowed. With a change in the political balance at Shire Hall, the county once again joined the partnership and proposed Castor as Peterborough's next expansion site. Other sites were put forward by landowners, anxious to benefit from the increased values that flow from development rights. One of them was over 800 acres of brickpits between Fletton and Yaxley. The pits had been filled with pulverised ash from power stations on the Trent.

The corporation's overriding concern was to ensure a continuing supply of houses. Professor Gordon Cameron, Head of the Department of Land Economy at Cambridge and a member of the board, analysed the issue carefully. 'We were all very keen to look at the brickpits to see if they

were an alternative. They are a derelict area as you come into the town on the parkway and go towards the cathedral... The trouble is that nobody knows if it is possible to build on fly ash. Consultants say it is but nobody really knows. You have to make a judgement about what is technically feasible and good men and true will make different decisions about that.'

'I think we all wanted to go on to the brickpits if we could and, in that sense, save Castor, but in the end we had to go for Castor. It was a known, secure alternative compared to an insecure but exciting one.'

Nicholas Ridley, the Environment Secretary, resolved the issue at the end of July 1988 and decided that a new township should be built on London Brick Company's worked out claypits. Castor and Ailsworth gained a second reprieve.

Ridley did not brush aside the technical difficulties of building on Lord Hanson's reclaimed land but said: 'The unresolved land drainage matters, the need to assess the landscaping implications and the stability of buildings constructed on lagoon-filled, pulverised fuel ash were not sufficient to delay a decision in principle...' Work was expected to start on the first of 5,400 houses before the end of 1988. The entire township, including an oval lake and boulevards reminiscent of Welwyn Garden City, was forecast to cost £31 million – all of it from private sources.

## 8. NEW TOWNS ARE PEOPLE

Helpston is a pretty village a thirty minute bicycle ride from Peterborough. John Clare, the Northamptonshire poet, lived there until he was thirty-nine when he moved to Northborough only four miles away. In the age of the motor car and the global village four miles is hardly anything but, according to Margaret Drabble, 'the move, to one so deeply attached to place, was disturbing, and reinforced the theme of loss in his work'. Clare wrote about this feeling in a poem called *The Flitting* which dates from shortly after his move.<sup>25</sup>

'I sit me in my corner chair  
That seems to feel itself from home'

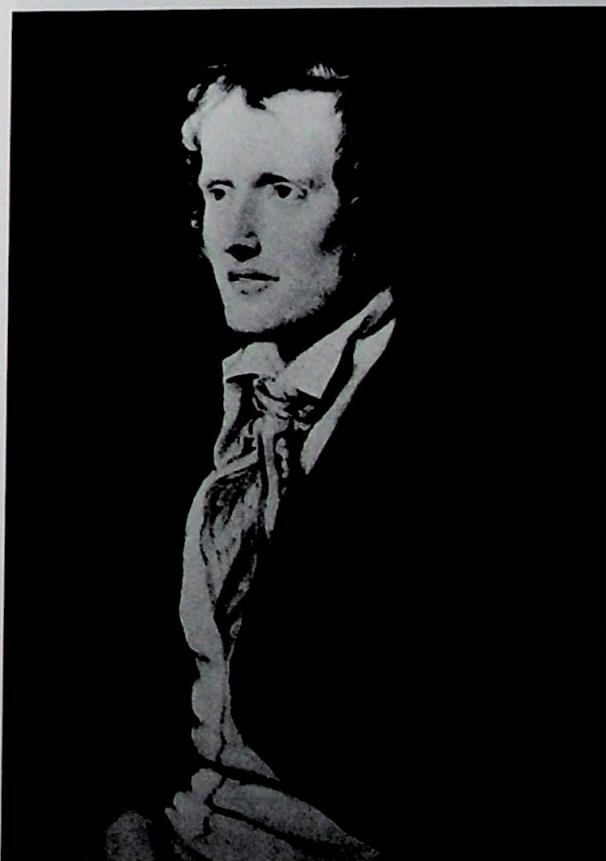
The feeling that even the furniture is pining is one that at least some Londoners will have known as they, in their time, moved their corner chairs the eighty miles to Peterborough. Women kept at home all day by young children were particularly prone to that sad sense of loss.

Penny Donovan, who moved with her husband Brian to Orton Goldhay from her mother's house in London, was someone who had no mum to turn to. 'It wasn't so bad for the first seven months. I was working. Then I had John. It was very lonely then. We used to go back to London quite frequently – about every month – and our relatives came to us.'

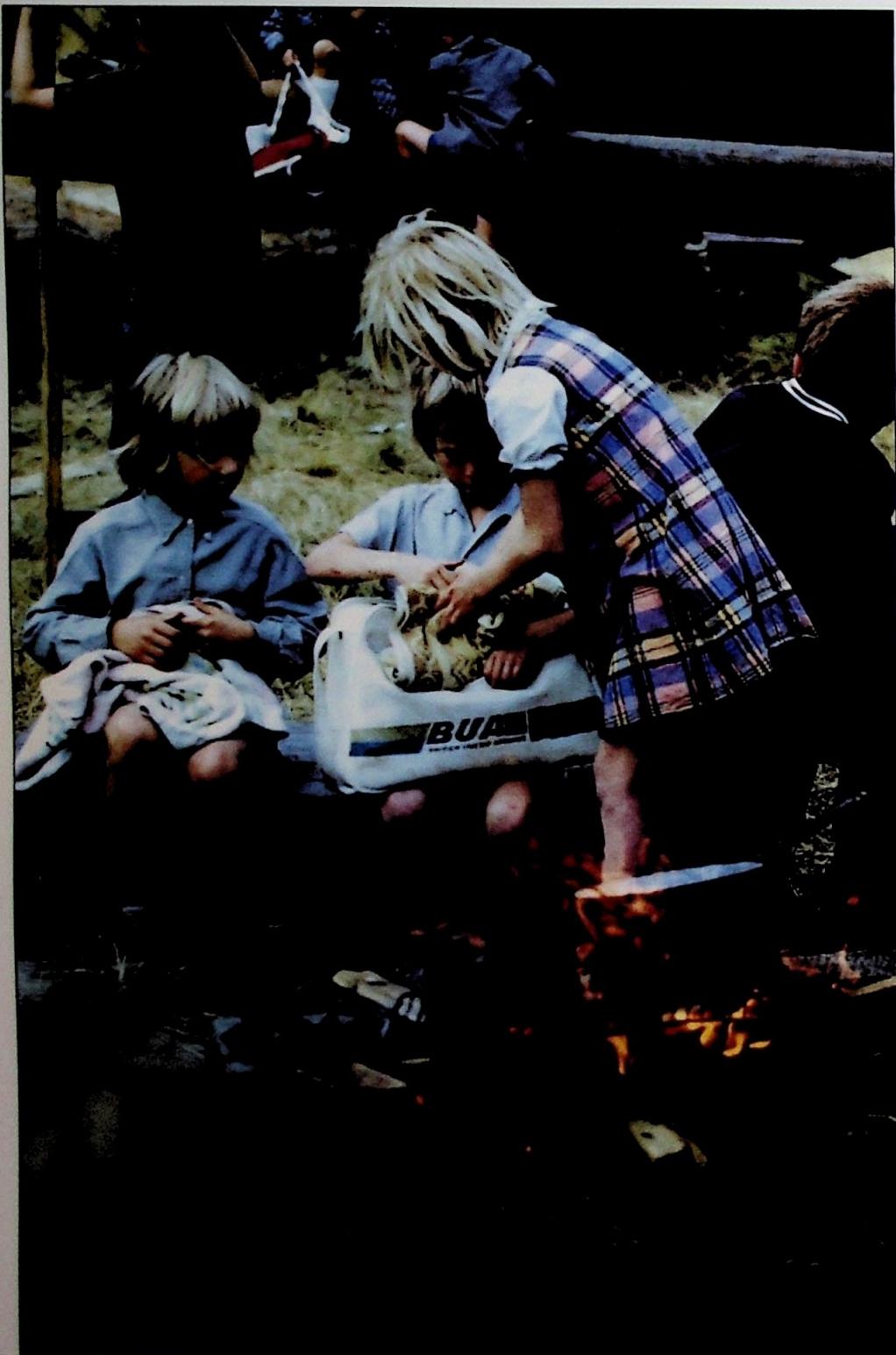
Adjusting to new surroundings at work or school was something most newcomers had to face. Michael Mulhern found this when he started at Perkins, the diesel engineers. In London he had worked for the Underground in, of all places, the open air and liked it. When at first he arrived in Peterborough he missed being out of doors. 'But I got used to the change. I doubt that I could work out of doors now, especially in the cold weather.'

Eileen Mulhern remembered a more comfortable adaptation – adjusting to a slower pace of life. 'It was the buses. In London you had to be up and moving before you got to your stop – even if you had a child in your arms – otherwise you didn't make it: you didn't get off. But here the bus drew to a stop and it was, "Are you getting off at this one m'duck". You didn't have to get up until the bus had stopped. It was all very slow – a lot easier.'

Were the Mulherns homesick for London in the early days? 'We were very busy. We wanted



John Clare (1793–1864), an agricultural labourer, rose to fame in 1820 with the publication of his Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery. (Peterborough Central Library)



to make a go of it. I don't think we ever missed London much but some people came and moaned about the place. They were probably Londoners who still had family there and just couldn't settle. Some did go back,' Eileen recalled.

Gerry Burns, the corporation's housing manager, experienced at first hand how the newcomers coped. If they stayed for a year or more they severed their links with London, made new friends and tended to put down roots. 'We've never had any real new town blues', he added.

**I**t was not as if inner London was a bed of roses. Michael and Eileen Mulhern once went back to where they had lived in Islington – just for a look. 'We went into the corner shop and we didn't know anybody and we went into a little park where we used to take the kids and we didn't know anybody there either. And the houses looked bigger and, I suppose, neglected. Some had corrugated iron in front of the windows. That looked very sad.'

The corporation's method of trying to prevent new town blues was summed up in the phrase 'social development'. According to Phil Doran, who took over from Robin Guthrie as social development officer in 1975, this meant concentrating on the people for whom the new town was being built and not thinking just about bricks and mortar.

'Thinking people' had its foundations in the master plan: '... we are convinced that our overriding concern must be to offer the highest possible quality of social and family life for all, from managing director to office cleaner. We are determined to make Greater Peterborough a pre-eminently good place in which to be born, to grow up, to make friends, to have fun, to learn, to work, to play, to bring up children, to lead a full adult life at any cultural level and to spend a contented retirement.'

A comparison of these objectives with those set out a year earlier by Richard Llewelyn-Davies

*'Thinking people.'*

and Walter Bor in their master plan for Milton Keynes is instructive. There were six goals for the huge grid-planned new city in north Buckinghamshire:

- Opportunity and freedom of choice.
- Easy movement and access, and good communications.
- Balance and variety.
- An attractive city.
- Public awareness and participation.
- Efficient and imaginative use of resources.

Many differences may be found in the two sets of objectives but a significant one is the human-centeredness of those for Peterborough. Those for Milton Keynes are more philosophical and abstract – and it is arguable that this difference persisted in the work of the two development corporations throughout their respective lives. Mind you, a new town *is* about bricks and mortar, flows of traffic and square feet of factory space. ‘Thinking people’ all the time is a major challenge.

Lord Reith’s New Towns Committee of 1945–1946 had, however, done its best to provide guidelines for something better than glorified municipal housing estates. Reith’s second interim report stressed the importance of variety in employment and a spread of income groups. In his final report he argued that opportunities for recreation should be provided in advance of demand and made suggestions for theatre, music and the arts; the building of dance-halls, restaurants, tea-shops and cafes; the promotion of clubs (provided they were not merely drinking saloons!); the setting up of archives and the protection of archaeological remains. Reith understood too the importance of churches.<sup>7</sup>

By the late sixties, when Peterborough became a new town, this people-centred, ‘holistic’ approach to town-making was well entrenched. Phil Doran identified the two strands in it. ‘Social policy was busy defining people’s needs before they were there to articulate them. Community development was concerned with people as they arrived. It was there to assist them as individuals and as members of groups.’

Project teams working on the townships, the city centre or other parts of the new Peterborough therefore included officers from Doran’s department. The teams were not composed only of architects, engineers and surveyors.

Once the incomers started arriving they were offered help to find the way to the shops, post office and surgery and ‘how you avoided going through a sea of mud to get to them’. As new houses were handed over to the corporation by the builders, community workers would, for a time, set up in one. Help was concentrated most on housewives without a neighbouring mother (or mother-in-law) and without relatives in the town.

The new arrivals got a welcome from the community workers and also from local traders. Gerry Burns recalled the details. ‘Everybody was visited and invited to coffee to meet their new neighbours. There was a commercial welcome wagon too. The milkman would always put out a pound of butter and three bottles of milk on the first day to welcome them into the new house. The milkmen used to queue up outside the housing office to find out who was coming in.’

Phil Doran defined the corporation’s role as that of a midwife. People were individuals and inevitably sorted themselves out in their own way. ‘We were helping them to telescope into five years the normal twenty year process of settling down and growing roots in the community.’

Other agencies were also involved in helping the newcomers to feel at home. At Orton Goldhay the Donovans were called upon by the parson, Michael Scott. ‘Mick knocked on the door the day after we moved in and said: “Do you need a bed? Do you need anything?” We couldn’t believe it – that someone would just knock on the door and ask if we needed anything.’ Mick the Vic, as he was called, became for the Donovans, as for many of their neighbours, a much-loved friend.

Local housing management played a key part in community development because it gave senior management a hot line to the newcomers.



*The 'welcome wagon': the Bretton community team.*

And Burns' local managers were in action from the moment a new family arrived.

'We used to move in a maximum of forty families every weekend – on average about twenty a week. They all moved in on a Friday or over the weekend ready to start work on a Monday. We had it so well engineered that we never had any problems: we used to do everything for them.'

'... when they signed up for their houses we would get them to sign the supply form for gas, for water and for electricity. We would process the pieces of paper. We would make sure the supplies were on. In the winter months we'd make sure the central heating was on.'

This could be seen as the nanny society in full flower but as Phil Doran explained, 'it would have been chaos if every individual had had to try and organise all this from eighty miles away. It

was not paternalistic. It was practical – for the gas and electricity boards as much as for the newcomers.'

At Bretton, where there was district heating, Gerry Burns was able to keep a warmed house on 'hold' every weekend. 'We had emergency cooking facilities and emergency beds so that if a removal van broke down and a family arrived late on a Friday night everything was there for them. We had all the back-up services. We had an emergency officer on duty. We were fairly skilled at it.'

Over the years the focus of action of the social development department changed. During the seventies when township after township was emerging from its chrysalis of mud, the staff were busiest at the neighbourhood level. Peter Shore's 1977 review, and the emphasis it put on new



*Lady Lodge Arts Centre – a jester and a juggler.*

towns taking broken families and people without skills, gave added urgency to this kind of work. But once that bridgehead had been secured, it was possible to switch some energy to the creation and support of arts centres, orchestras and youth training.

Lady Lodge arts centre, just down the road from the Donovans at Orton Goldhay, was one such consolidating piece of social development. Lady Lodge Farm, parts of which dated from the 18th century, was by 1977 encircled by the new town. It was also in the way. Phil Doran's department prepared a paper for the board suggesting that the old buildings should be converted into a community centre based on the arts. Wyndham Thomas was highly sceptical about the proposal and Bernard Brook-Partridge was at the board meeting when it was debated.

'Jimmy James said it would be a tragedy to

demolish it.' He thought the board should support the idea of an arts centre. Christopher Higgins, like Wyndham Thomas, was dubious, but the ever-persuasive James, supported by Brook-Partridge, swung the board behind the idea. Doran subsequently persuaded the Eastern Arts Association and the Gulbenkian Foundation to provide finance. Four artists in residence were engaged with a remit to pursue their own interests and impart their knowledge to others. Brook-Partridge, who became the first chairman of the residents' management committee, emphasised that Lady Lodge was not elitist. 'It wasn't a question of taking beads to the natives – it was to be a focal point for the community.'

Someone told Penny Donovan about Lady Lodge not long after John was born. 'The people there were very friendly. I did macramé and



*Adventure play.*

woodworking and John was able to join the crèche. There was a lot of volunteering. There used to be volunteers in the cafe making vegetarian meals.' Lady Lodge was Penny's first source of friends.

With the passage of time the arts centre, like Orton Goldhay around it, changed. An argumentative federal management structure was abandoned while under the direction of Dr Christine Riddington emphasis was switched from visual arts, such as painting and photography, to music and drama. Like the real-ale bar and cafe at the back of the arts centre, the switch to performance arts was designed to make Lady Lodge more popular and increase revenue. If, as Penny Donovan felt, the centre lost some of the mateyness of its frontier days, that was probably inevitable. Institutions, like people, have to evolve.

Peterborough folk have a reputation for being friendly. The Mulherns, the Donovans and Councillor Charles Swift (he and his parents arrived from Yorkshire in the fifties) all vouched

for that. But it would have been extraordinary had the newcomers not been the object of resentment. John Horrell, who gave evidence against the new town for the National Farmers' Union, but whose family dairy had put out some of those welcoming milk bottles, recalled that initially 'there *was* antagonism against the new population'. One reason was that London 'overspill', as it was widely and brutally called in the sixties, did not have a good name. Horrell, a farmer, a corporation board member and a naturally conservative man, attributed this to the experience of towns in the vicinity of Peterborough.

'Huntingdon foolishly took a block of London overspill, put it all in one place and left a very divided town. St Neots handled it a bit better by phasing it in. St Ives did better than either of them by taking no overspill at all but by taking those who brought in firms and who wanted to build a house away from where the overspill was. Those sorts of lessons helped all of us.'

Feelings of antagonism were also discovered by members of the corporation staff. Mary Walker, who became Christopher Higgins' secretary in February 1968, sang in a choir and was stung by bitter criticism from the choir director. She recalled too how some people put up, and then quickly removed, development corporation car stickers. 'They didn't get their car windows broken, but the feeling was there – that these awful people have come to change things.'

The Stevenage 'Silkingrad' tape was being played again. The British have always had a deep distrust of government. No doubt it is an essential prop of freedom but it is no fun being at the receiving end of it.

The corporation coped with these inevitable antagonisms in two ways – by providing as best it could for the newcomers and by pressing on with improvements to Peterborough's roads, parks and city centre that would be of benefit to everyone.

The first neighbourhood community centre was opened at Ravensthorpe as early as 1972. An



adventure playground followed a year later. By the mid-seventies the corporation was busy turning a farm at Paston into a youth centre. Neighbourhood councils and their newsletters were another feature of township life. They worked to represent the residents to the corporation, provide information and establish networks.

Social development's bravest adventure was the Cresset at Bretton. It was the first major social facility in the new Peterborough. Robin Guthrie persuaded the corporation that clubs for the young, the elderly and the disabled, rather

than being separated and pushed out to the fringes of the township, should be pulled together at the centre. This concept translated itself into the Cresset, originally a word meaning a basket of fire at which people could light tapers and so carry fire back to their homes.

The Cresset was built in the centre of Bretton with a walkway to and from Sainsbury's running through the middle of it. A pub, shops and other commercial activities were incorporated in the centre to help pay for the non-commercial ones. It also contained a large YMCA hostel and a

*Ladies keep fit class at the Cresset.*



*The London Symphony  
Orchestra at the Cresset.*

sports centre that was used by local residents and a nearby school. The Cresset's construction was one of those histories corporation staff prefer to forget. Not one but two firms of builders went bankrupt while working on it and the cost of the building escalated from £1.5 to £2.2 million. However, persistence triumphed and thanks to much hard work, the patronage of Prince Richard of Gloucester, an appeal sponsored by the Earl and Countess Fitzwilliam, and a grand opening by the Queen in March 1978, the Cresset was successfully launched.

Phil Doran acknowledged the difficulties implicit in such a bold experiment. 'The initial analysis was not utopian but it was wrong. Young people had become more sophisticated. They wanted to be where the action was but not mixed up with adults. There were other problems

– size, an absence of defensible space and the complications of funding a federal institution. But there were lots of benefits too. It was an important development in social provision and the model for a similar centre in Warrington.'

A totally different challenge emerged in the mid-seventies as the economic crisis provoked by oil price increases led to a surge of unemployment amongst young people. In September 1976, 384 school leavers were without work. A year later 499 out of 1,500 school-leavers were jobless.

The corporation responded positively to this kind of despair as it had to the loneliness of the first arrivers. A start was made with a 200 place skill-centre designed to get kids off the streets and up-rate their abilities. It was followed by



families, no divorce and no vandalism. In the real world there are, and Peterborough is as much a part of that world as anywhere else. Furthermore there was, as invariably happens, a tendency to make the newcomers scapegoats for any problems. The belief that some of the Londoners were dubious characters in the first place was thought to justify such prejudice. People conveniently forgot that even barrels of home-grown apples tend to contain duds.

A question put by a member to Cambridgeshire County Council in September 1978 shows that the issue got further than being bar-room gossip. 'Is it true,' the councillor asked, 'that the Police and Social Services input at Orton is three times that required elsewhere in Peterborough and if so what are the main contributory causes and what plans have they for overcoming the situation?'

The chief constable for the county answered and reported that Orton was growing rapidly and 'is now being almost entirely occupied by

*LEFT: Badminton at the Cresset.*

*BETWEEN: The day centre for elderly people at the Cresset.*

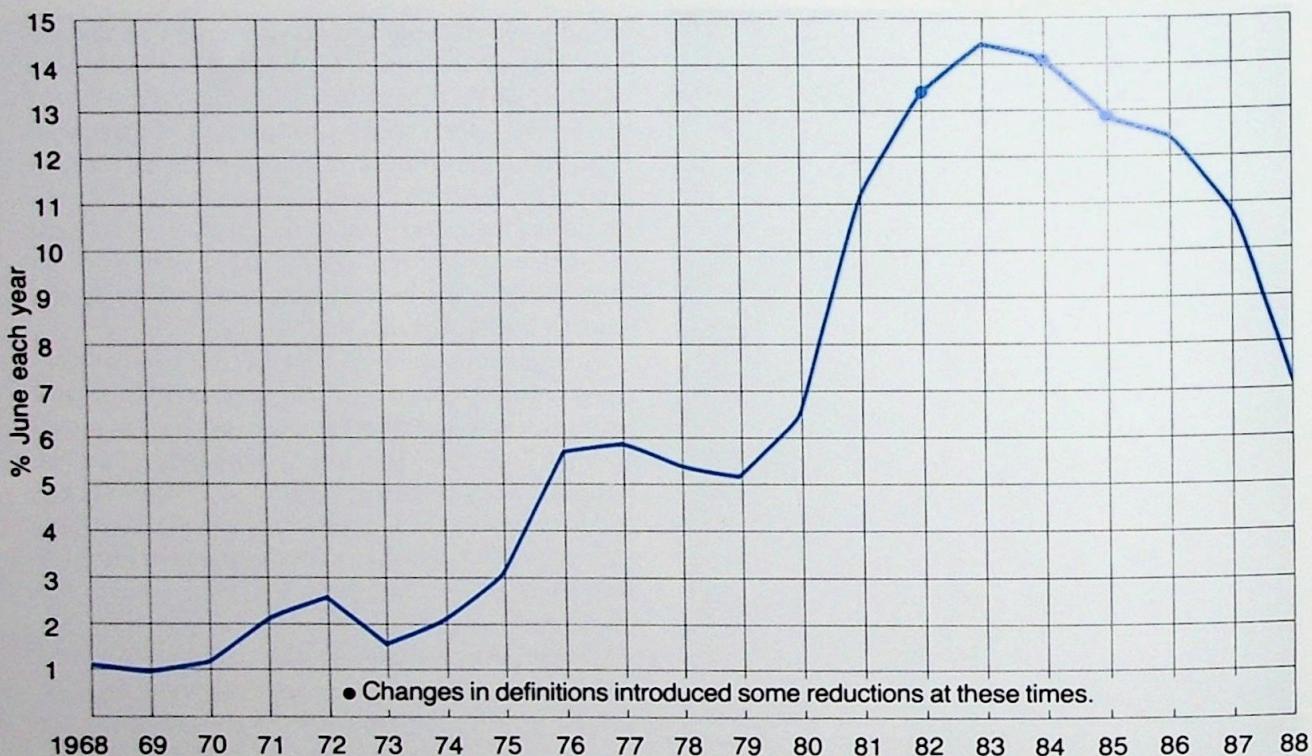
temporary job schemes funded by the Manpower Services Commission under which young people were placed at the corporation's own tree nursery at Castor, at the Nene Valley Steam Railway and elsewhere. Training workshops, community service and employee experience schemes followed.

By the time of the second surge of unemployment in the eighties the corporation had a substantial track record in helping people on the dole. Mostyn Davies, an industrial chaplain appointed to the new town by the Bishop of Peterborough, was active in this field. 'We were able to get big projects up and running very fast. The corporation helped with resources and social development created the networks. But they weren't overbearing. They didn't tell us what to do. They were enabling.'

In an ideal world there would be no problem



*Unemployment in Peterborough's travel-to-work area. Note the surges after the oil price increases of 1973 and the recession of 1979.*



families re-housed from the more deprived areas of the inner Greater London Council area. This population is already creating a number of problems in connection with emergency calls to disturbances, domestic situations, licensed premises and assaults'. However he went on to say that the answer to the councillor's question was 'No', although an increase in police manning at all the new townships was under consideration.

Wyndham Thomas grew accustomed to re-

butting the implications of such questions. 'It was never true but it was thought to be true – by some people. I would have it checked with the clerk of the justices after accusations had been made about the criminality of the residents of this or that township.'

'The answer was always the same. The crime rate was always lower than in the city of Cambridge. Crime was always higher in Cambridge than Peterborough – and still is.'

## 9. GETTING ABOUT

Opinions differ about when the motor age began in Britain but a good case can be made for 1959. That year saw the opening of the first stretch of the M1 motorway and, in the City of Westminster, the planting of the country's first thicket of parking meters. Could better symbols be found of the coming of age of the car than that tantalising mix of freedom and freedom withheld?

In the decade that followed highway engineers, economists and town planners struggled to cope with the four-wheeled leviathan. In Peterborough the task was taken up by Tom Hancock and his team of planners. Meanwhile more and more cars poured on to the country's roads, the national motorway system began to take on its distinctive 'H' shape, Dr Beeching delivered his

famous report on re-shaping the railways and numerous municipal bus companies slipped from profit into loss.

Another sign of the times was the change taking place in the planning of new roads. The old way had been to deal with problems piecemeal. In the absence of computers, little more was possible. The new way involved not just counting cars but collecting facts about people and how they travelled.

London was the first place in Britain to undertake a modern transportation study. The outcome was a web of motorways and spaghetti junctions of such heroic proportions that it provoked a 'Homes Before Roads' party to contest the 1970 Greater London Council elections. Not long after the roads plan was dropped.



Bridge Street – one of Peterborough's main shopping streets – in the late 1960s.

Environmentalists, battling against the new roads as their ancestors had the new railways, saw it as a great victory. In Peterborough Tom Hancock's road proposals, also the outcome of a computer-based study, produced a similar furore but the eventual outcome was quite different.

Two main views existed at the time about how to cope with cars in cities. One, enunciated with unsurpassed clarity across the Channel by President Pompidou, was '*Paris doit s'adapter à la voiture*'. Paris must bend before the car. (Parisians, it so happens, disagreed with him and rejected his plan to drive an expressway within a hundred metres of Notre Dame.) The contrary view was, of course, to bend the car to fit the city, a proposition easier to express than execute.

For both sides in this argument Colin Buchanan's *Traffic in Towns* report was the Bible.<sup>16</sup> Buchanan himself confessed to dismay at the sight of vehicles filling up every corner of the land. Deploying his case with the eloquence of a twentieth century Ruskin, he argued that since man's love for his car seemed to be an irresistible force, the quality of his environment should be established as an immovable object. But even this seemingly benign paradox led to huge skeins of

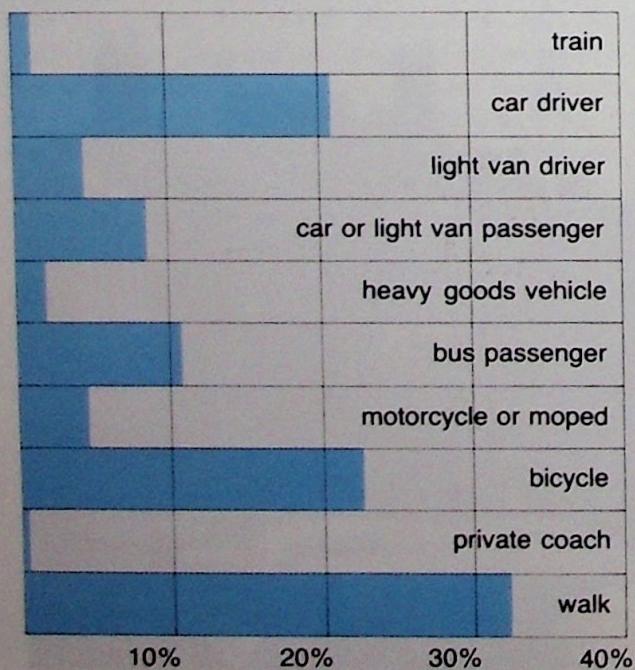
urban highways, as Buchanan showed in his case study of Newbury. In London's West End it led to total reconstruction.

The inescapable truth was that the car had become as much a part of the city as the house. What, after all, was a car but a mobile room. There was no way back to an imaginary, comfortable, car-less past.

For designers of new towns there were two milestones along the way to this conclusion. One was Cumbernauld in Scotland, the first new town to be designed around motorways. Cumbernauld was also an eccentric because, in response to criticism of the 'prairie planning' of the earlier new towns, Hugh Wilson modelled it on a tight-packed, Tuscan hill-town. The other milestone was Runcorn, across the Mersey from Liverpool. Arthur Ling, its master planner, was a former city architect of Coventry and had the creation of Britain's first car-free city centre amongst his campaign medals.

When Ling got to Runcorn his first thoughts were to have a monorail – something that also occurred to Tom Hancock at Peterborough. Monorails were in fashion in the sixties and it was possible to go and ride on an elegant, cigar-shaped prototype built by the Safège company near Paris. Interest in the idea peaked when Fred Pooley, Buckinghamshire's visionary county architect, unveiled plans for a monorail-based new town on the site of what was to become Milton Keynes. Travel would have been 'free' – that is paid from the rates.

Putting public transport up in the air seemed the obvious way of bypassing the traffic congestion that was increasingly clogging up the buses on the roads. Run smooth, silver vehicles on tracks twenty feet above the ground and then build up the city around their clean, silent, electric services – it seemed ideal. The snags were the cost of building that road in the air and, as with buses, the walk to and from stops. Arthur Ling's solution was to build Runcorn around a 'busway', a road exclusively for buses, and, as at Cumbernauld, to reduce walking distances by squeezing the houses together.



Travel (all journeys) in Peterborough in 1966: from Tom Hancock's draft plan.

All these ideas were buzzing around as Tom Hancock and his team wrestled to produce a workable plan for both the new and the old Peterborough. In the five years up to 1966, a period when the population of the city had been largely static, the number of cars on the roads had increased from about 22,000 to 40,000. When Hancock pushed the population growth figures into his computer the print-out showed that by 1981 Peterborough's roads were going to have to cope with four times as many cars. And he calculated that in the town centre it would be necessary to increase parking from 2,400 to 10,000 spaces.

However not all the news was bad. Peterborough was, in one way at least, an environmental paradise. People bicycled everywhere. A third of all journeys to work were made by bike and throughout the day more than half of all journeys were done on foot or by bicycle. Peterborough, like Cambridge, Norwich and Bedford, was a cyclists' Mecca. The lack of hills and the dry climate helped but it was also because the big employers were dotted about all over the town at places ill-served by the buses. Going by bike was cheaper and quicker.

Left to themselves towns tend to grow like onions, putting on growth skin by skin or ring by ring. Roads radiate out from the centre and every time a new skin is added additional waves of workers and shoppers try to head for the centre. Cathedral Square at Peterborough, uglified in the sixties by the acid yellow paint of a 'box junction', told only too clearly of the consequences.

Imagine trying to feed four times as many cars through such a place. Hancock decided not to try, but to break out of the constricting rings of the onion. He did this by arranging the new Peterborough along routes running past the old city thereby enabling both through and inter-township traffic to avoid the city centre. A diagram in Hancock's plan entitled 'Route Theory' makes clear that, overall, the new city was to be banana- rather than onion-shaped. It would have a linear plan.

Linear planning cropped up in two other

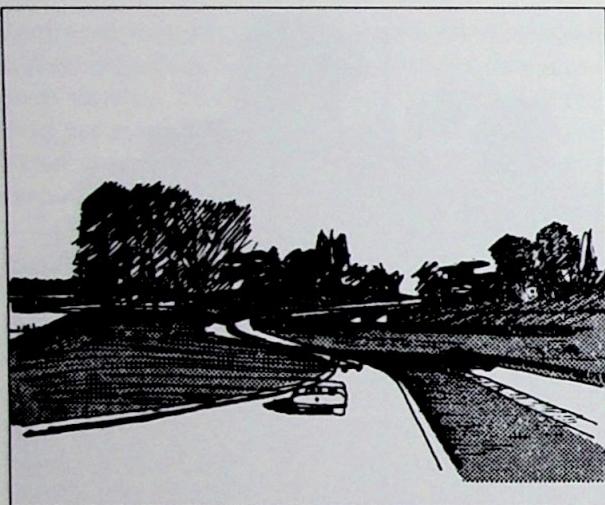


*People bicycled everywhere.*

places in Hancock's new Peterborough – in the city centre and in the townships. The centre was to be extended westwards over the railway and along Thorpe Road in the form of an office-lined boulevard. The townships were all arranged like fishbones with development projecting in ribs from both sides of spine roads.

Linear towns, like the 'social city', were a late nineteenth century idea aimed at harnessing the potential of the electric tram and providing for urban growth. The prophet of them was a Spaniard, Arturo Soria y Mata. Soria, like his contemporary Ebenezer Howard, was a philosopher who succeeded in putting his ideas into practice. (His first '*Barriada de la Ciudad Lineal*' – rationalised ribbon development – was built in Madrid in 1894.) The similarities between the two men are remarkable. Both were visionaries.

*The parkways as envisaged by Tom Hancock: a drawing from the draft plan.*



Both were fascinated by the then frontiers of information technology, Howard by the typewriter, Soria by the telegraph. Both built their dreams.

'The form of the city is, or must be, derived from the necessities of locomotion', Soria wrote in 1882. Conjuring up a vision of a future megalopolis arranged beside a road many times the width of the *Champs Elysées*, he wrote: 'A single street of 500 metres' width and of the length that may be necessary – such will be the city of the future whose extremities could be Cadiz and St. Petersburg, or Peking and Brussels.'<sup>6</sup>

Colin Buchanan, less flamboyantly, proposed the linking of Southampton and Portsmouth into exactly such a '*ciudad lineal*' when the Ministry of Housing and Local Government asked him to plan a huge new city beside the Solent.

Hancock's draft plan contained thirty-eight miles of motorways. These roads were set in swathes of grass, shrubs and trees punctuated here and there by prominent landmarks – intended perhaps to assist strangers to orient themselves within an otherwise largely invisible city. Hancock called the roads 'parkways'. (He had no doubt seen the beautiful parkways in Connecticut.) They were to be designed to Department of Transport urban motorway standards,

which meant fifty mph driving, and to have two lanes in each direction but with space left to widen them towards the end of the century.

One stretch of this parkway system crossed the Nene at Town Bridge, swung around between the railway station and the shopping centre and then, curving across the north side of the city centre at the level of the Odeon Cinema, crashed through hundreds of houses. It was textbook stuff from Buchanan's *Traffic in Towns* report but it was shocking for the good citizens of Peterborough.

Having examined and discarded monorails (and driverless shuttles of the kind later to be used at Gatwick), Hancock turned his attention to the humble omnibus. Two kinds of bus service took his fancy: feeder buses nipping to and fro at three minute intervals along the township spine roads; and express buses running at six minute intervals from the township centres, along the parkways to a 'bushall' between the railway station and the city centre shops. Passengers wanting to ride across the city would transfer to or from the feeder buses and the expresses at the township centres.

Hancock also proposed that all parts of the city be linked by footways and cycle tracks separated from the motor roads although he noted in his plan that the use of bicycles seemed already to be in decline and concluded that this would continue. 'It is inevitable that expansion will increase the length of journeys, and accelerate the decline in the share of trips made by cycles and on foot.'

Ken Hutton, who joined the corporation as chief engineer in December 1968, had the job of revising the transport components of the draft plan and softening the impact of the motorways. This was done by defining new objectives: to provide for quick and easy movement even at the busiest times of the day; to keep all costs, including the demolition of houses, within acceptable limits; and to build safety into the road system.

Hutton and his fellow engineers then got down to preparing a new mathematical model of travel in the city. They rolled forward the car-ownership forecasts and came up with 73,000 cars by

1990 but they also managed to trim four miles out of the parkway network. 'It was too long. The plan was over-loaded', Hutton observed.

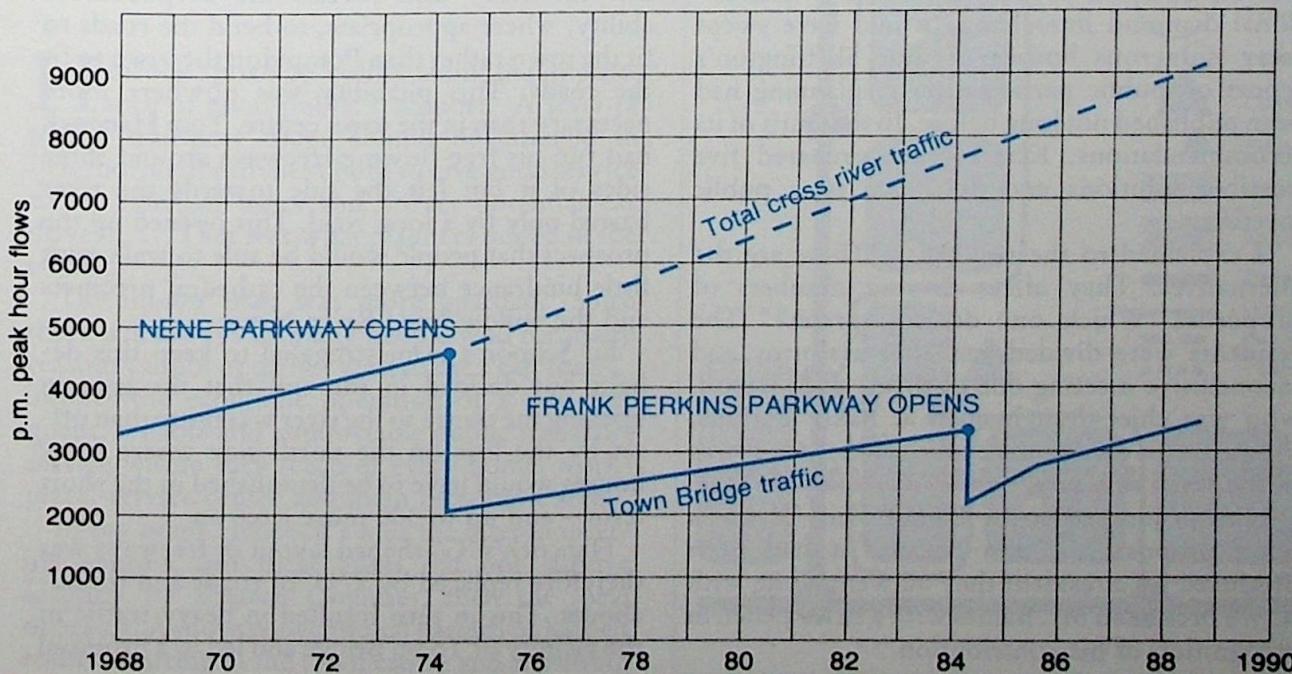
The trickiest of all the road problems, as Hancock had found to his cost, was getting traffic around the city centre. The corporation dealt with it by handing it over to a town centre team under Ed Schoon, the chief planning officer. The design of a town-wide cycleway network was left until later too. Meanwhile chairman Christopher Higgins wanted to see roads under construction.

**W**ork on Peterborough's first three miles of parkway was accordingly treated as a priority. The road, which was opened in October 1972, not only acted as a partial bypass to the city centre but provided access to Bretton, the first township. It speeded up driving for a lot of people including John Devaney, managing director of Perkins Engines. 'The biggest impact the development corporation had early on was on the road system. That started to make it easier to get to work.'

There is little doubt that 'impact' was initially the four-lane motorway's most important benefit since it was little used at first and was still very

comfy sixteen years later. David Bath, director of marketing and planning, explained the policy. 'In Peterborough we anticipate, we build ahead. We opened roads that were virtually empty when they were first there.'

Traffic congestion may be a rarity on the parkways but building them was not without its dramas. On one occasion a pilot was forced down on to the Soke parkway in thick fog. On another, youngsters commandeered a bulldozer and smashed it into the scaffolding of an incomplete footbridge. (The resident engineer threatened to have them publicly whipped in Cathedral Square.) On a third, the drivers of two earth-scrappers met in a fatal crash. Yet bit by bit the network was put together, and as the paving trains were dismantled so the landscape contractors moved in. There was plenty for them to do. To minimise the nuisance of traffic noise on nearby houses the corporation tried, wherever practical, to make banks on both sides of the motorways and then plant them with thickets of trees. These were the parks of the parkways that Hancock had foreseen. There were hundreds of acres of them – room for millions of shrubs and saplings.



*Traffic at Town Bridge showing how the flow of vehicles fell in 1974 and again in 1984 when first one and then the other of the new parkway bridges was opened.*



*Nene Parkway with the headquarters of Thomas Cook in the distance.*

One junction on Soke parkway gave rise to exceptional problems because a conventional diamond interchange would have swept away numerous houses. Arthur Skeffington's report on public participation in planning had been published not long before. In the spirit of its recommendations, Ken Hutton prepared five possible solutions and put them to a public meeting.

'I explained to the residents: "These are the alternatives. They affect varying numbers of properties. Which one do you prefer?" The residents were divided and after a stormy and inconclusive meeting one of them, a Mr Baines, who was chief draughtsman at Baker Perkins, produced his own scheme for the junction. It was in the form of a lyre.'

Hutton jumped at the Baines plan. 'It was a good proposal ... and because it had been produced by a resident they all went along with it. We presented Mr. Baines with a silver pencil in recognition of his contribution.'

Arthur Skeffington would have been delighted. But the story also reveals the corporation's ability, where appropriate, to bend the roads to fit the town rather than Pompidou the town to fit the roads. This pliability was nowhere more necessary than in the town centre. Tom Hancock had run his free-flowing freeways around three sides of it but left the side towards the river barred only by a local road. This opened up the prospect that people would be able to walk with little hindrance between the cathedral precincts and the willow-lined River Nene.

Ed Schoon's team struggled to keep this delight but decided in the end that the gain in opening the centre to the river was more than offset by the loss on the north side where forty houses would have to be demolished in the short term – and up to 300 more later on.

Hancock's 'G'-shaped layout of freeways was therefore replaced by a 'U' of roads and roundabouts. This in turn resulted in heavy traffic in the vicinity of Town Bridge and led to a proposal

for a footbridge that would have created a hurdle for shoppers wanting to stroll down the river. Happily the bridge proved too costly and was replaced by pedestrian-controlled signals thereby preserving, in large part, the best of Hancock's original conception.

Not all of the parkways in the master plan were built. Hardly was the ink on the plan dry before the Minister for Transport, caught up in one of the perennial economic crises of the 1970s, started sniffing around for savings. Two flyovers on the Soke Parkway were axed as early as 1971 and only built years later. Further deferrals flowed from Peter Shore's new towns review in 1977 when the unbuilt Fletton and Frank Perkins parkways were cut to single carriageways – only to have their width restored at the time of their construction. Not until Michael Heseltine's 1980 review was real blood spilt. With the cancellation of Castor township, two parkways were cut.

Boongate, a road that connects the east side of the city centre to the parkways, was another victim of economy – much to Ken Hutton's regret. 'That was a mistake but it was completely outside the corporation's control. Boongate should have been built as a dual carriageway.'

Hancock spoke up boldly about the importance of good public transport. 'A level of public transport usage should be attained in Peterborough sufficient both to give good service to its essential users and attract potential car drivers . . .' That was what planners hoped in the sixties.

The master plan was more guarded. 'Since there will always be many people who for many reasons cannot or do not wish to use a car, this . . . implies the economic operation of a fast, frequent, reliable and comfortable public transport service within easy reach of every home, workplace, service centre and main recreation area.'

In the event Hancock's idea for interconnecting express and local buses did not survive scrutiny by Eastern Counties, then the local operator. A more conventional pattern of looped routes, starting in the town centre and circuiting

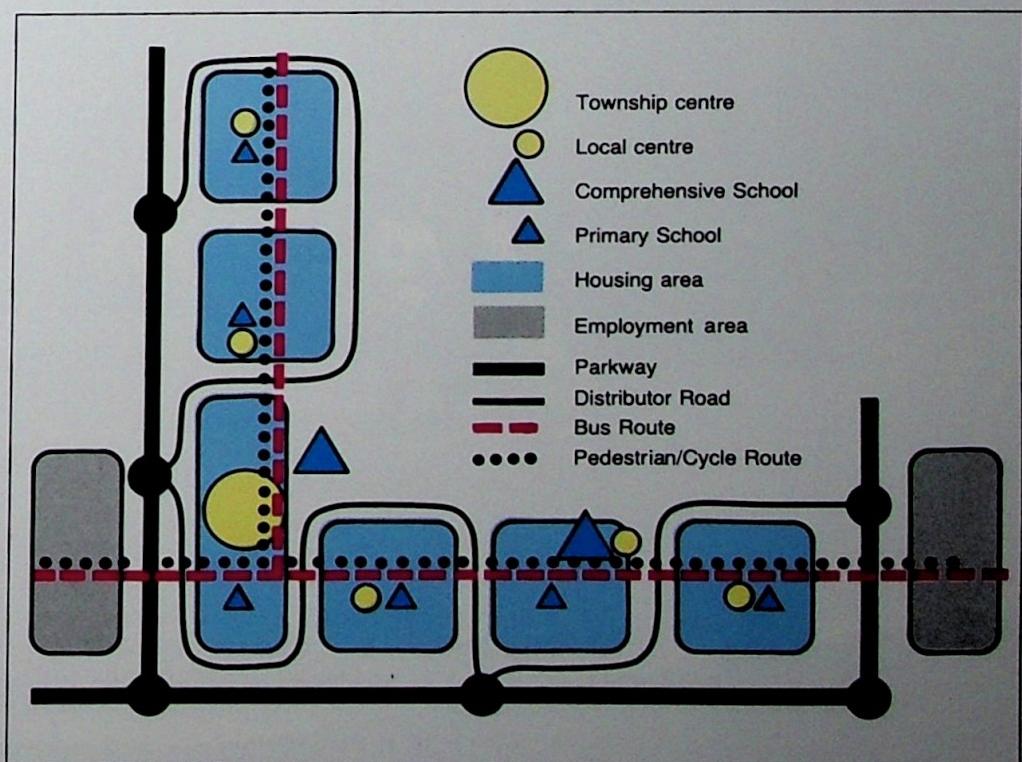
through one or other of the townships, was adopted instead. Lengths of bus-only road were used to speed buses on their way and penetrate shopping centres.

Bretton, the first township, has only a short length of bus-only road at its centre. At Orton, the second township, David Nowell, the corporation's deputy chief engineer, introduced a new concept. Nowell brought to Peterborough experience he had gained at Redditch new town where a low cost approach to bus priority had been developed.

Redditch was three years ahead of Peterborough, having been set in motion by Sir Keith Joseph on the same day in April 1964 as Runcorn. The ubiquitous Hugh Wilson was the master planner (his full tally was five new towns) and while he wanted to prevent the buses from getting bogged down in congestion, he rejected Runcorn's costly busways. He proposed, instead, that the Redditch buses should run on local roads freed as far as possible from other traffic.

Short lengths of bus-only road were the tech-

*Diagram of Orton township showing the bus route running through the neighbourhoods as a string through beads.*







nique employed to protect the buses from congestion and eventually Redditch had four miles of such special road. David Nowell adopted a similar approach at Orton and ran the bus route through the middles of a succession of neighbourhoods as if it was a string running through beads. At every neighbourhood centre a short stretch of bus-only road stops cars from using the same route. Where the route crosses a parkway it does so by a flyover or underpass. At crossings of secondary roads, the buses automatically command the special traffic signals to go 'green'.

The Department of Transport judged the bus priorities in Orton to be sufficiently experimental to justify a 75 per cent grant. Ken Hutton reckons they got their money's worth. 'There is some sharing of the roads with cars but the directness of the route and the dedicated stretches have knocked twenty minutes off the time the buses would have taken on a round trip to the city centre using conventional roads.'

The adaptation of traffic signals in the older parts of the city would have brought cumulative benefits to bus passengers but turned out to exceed the corporation's remit and the city council's purse. There are even doubts whether the electronics at Orton will be replaced when they wear out.

More bus-responsive traffic lights were installed at Werrington and twin cycle lanes painted on the main bus-only road. Ken Hutton reckoned that the benefits of spreading the cost of the road in this way were not offset by danger. 'We felt that buses could mix with cyclists in this way because their drivers are probably the most careful on the roads. The buses only run every twenty minutes so they hardly present a threat to the riders.'

Eventually six miles of bus-only roads sped the buses around the city and, like Heineken, got them to parts other transports cannot reach. Bus passengers enjoyed comparable benefits in the city centre in 1982 when all city and country buses began to serve the new Queensgate bus station. Walking distances to many of the shops were cut by two-thirds and shoppers, instead of battling across busy roads, could ride an escalator

*Cathedral Square.*



RIGHT AND OPPOSITE:  
*Queensgate bus station.*



directly from the buses into Queensgate.

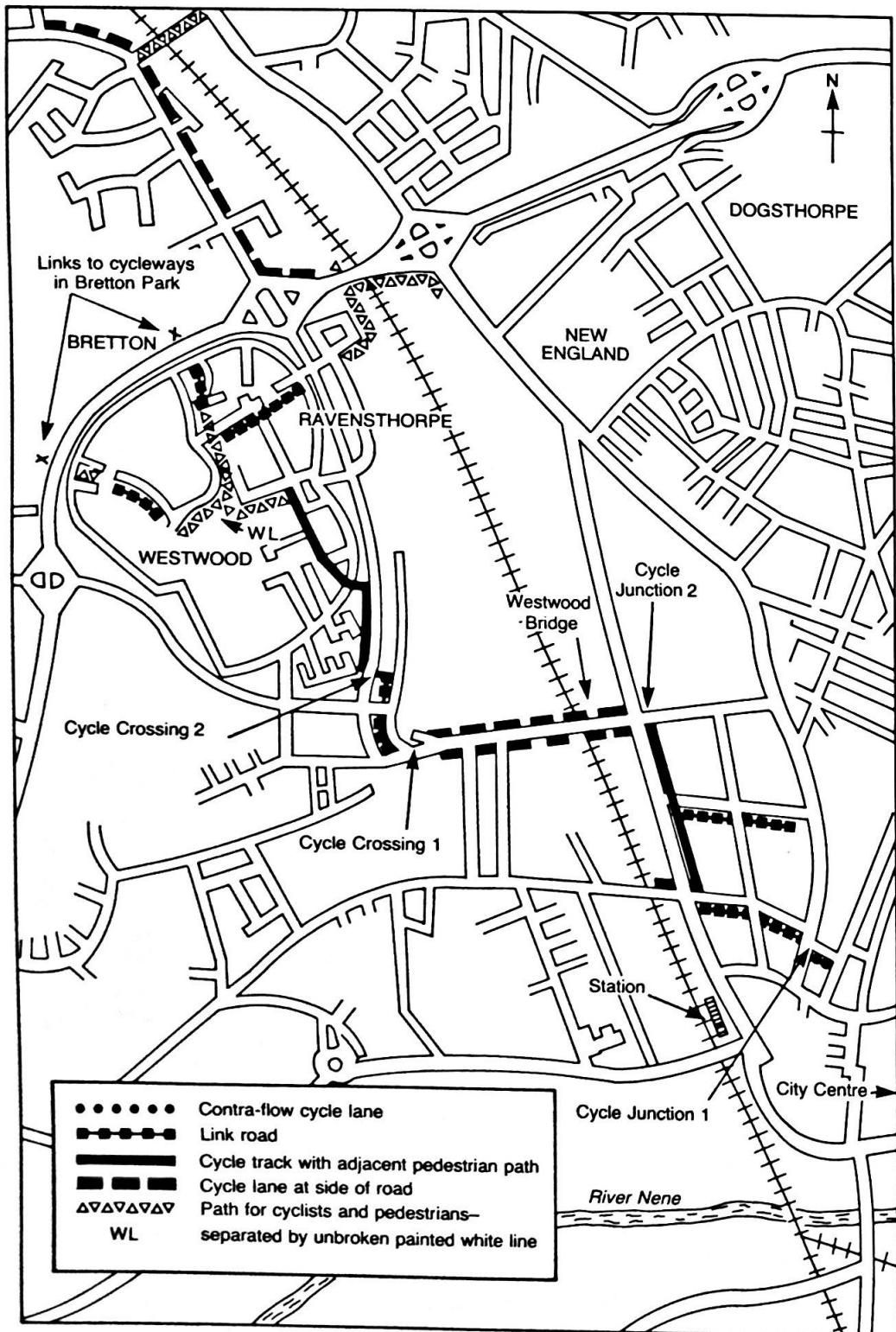
Bicycling in Peterborough declined substantially between the sixties and the seventies. By 1973 only one in five commuters bicycled – although this was still more than twice the national average. However on a typical weekday cyclists were estimated to make 25,000 trips, a figure that alone made a case for a town-wide network of cycle tracks. The case was reinforced by the prospect that, as the town grew, the number of pedalling commuters might increase from 11,000 to 17,000. The partnership accordingly agreed to spend £1.7 million on cycleways.

As with buses, so with bicycles, theory developed alongside experience. At Bretton, where the cyclists' network was agreed only after general construction had begun, most of the tracks run beside the main footpaths, separated from them only by a low kerb. Elsewhere pedestrians and cyclists share paths. Orton's cycle-system is more extensive than Bretton's but, unlike Werrington's, rarely combined with bus routes.

Peterborough's cyclists took their turn too to be guinea pigs for the Department of Transport. The innovations they tested were dotted along a three mile route from Bretton to the city centre. The corporation installed traffic signals that responded to the arrival of cyclists (the first of their kind in the country), contra-flow and with-flow cycle lanes, signposting through quiet back streets, and other tricks of the traffic-manager's trade. The cost in 1977 prices was £60,000 and the aim was to give riders a safe run from the township, with its cycleways, through the obstacles and across the main roads of the inner city.

The weather was very poor when the Transport and Road Research Laboratory surveyed the guinea pigs on the new route but a five per cent increase was counted compared with a decline of ten per cent elsewhere in the city. Interviews also gave favourable results. The improved conditions along the route were found to be persuading people to start bicycling and make additional trips. Encouraged by these results, the city made the experiments permanent.

## THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT



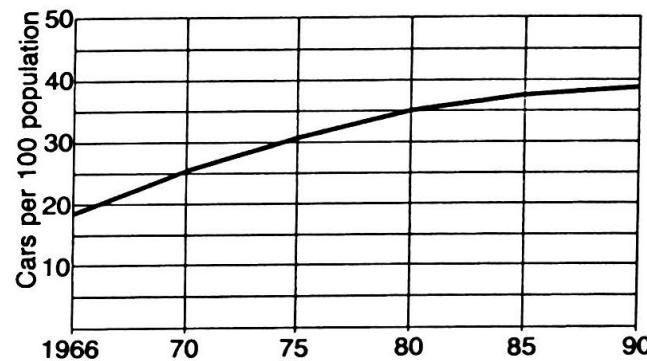
In June 1982 Sir George Young, junior minister in the Department of the Environment, arrived in Peterborough to try out the Bretton route. Charles Swift, the board's only regular cyclist (he rode three miles to and from work every day and 'never on a road') led the minister on a guided tour through the old and new parts of the city. Swift was proud of what the city council had done to match the work of the corporation. 'It would be wrong just to see the cycleways in the new town if you've missed what we've done in the city.' Notable amongst the facilities introduced by the city were underpasses of the ring-road near Queensgate and 'cycle gates' that enable riders to bypass NO ENTRY signs and pedal along city centre streets reserved mainly for pedestrians.

The corporation's Bob Hill, who both collected Sir George and arranged an extra large bicycle for him, observed that the minister came well prepared for his two-wheeled tour. 'He brought his bicycle clips with him. He had them in his pocket.' Close examination of a photograph taken on the occasion suggests that chairman Jeremy Rowe adhered to a more amateur cycling tradition. He tucked his trousers into his socks.

**E**veryone knows that forecasting traffic flows is a piece of cake. Everyone, that is, except the engineers who have the job of doing it. The recent history of Peterborough nicely illustrates the difficulties. Tom Hancock considered that, 'If current trends continue, car ownership will double by 1981, which, with Peterborough's anticipated rise in population, will mean a four-fold increase in the number of cars in the city.'

He then got down to the number crunching that would help indicate how much traffic Peterborough's future roads ought to be designed to carry. And here he had to make an intelligent guess about what proportion of people would drive, walk, cycle or take the bus to work. After deliberation he decided to base his plan on an assumption that by 1981 some 65 per cent of commuters would go by car and 20 per cent by bus.

When the corporation redid these calculations the target year for forecasts was changed to 1990 – by which time it was expected that rising incomes and rising population would bring about a fivefold increase in the city's 1966 fleet of cars. But like Hancock before them, the corporation engineers had to make an intelligent guess about how people would travel. The city engineer favoured 'full motorisation', which in those days meant 85 per cent of commuters going by car.



*The forecast of Peterborough car ownership from the master plan.*

**BELOW:** Charles Swift pedals with Sir George Young, Parliamentary Secretary, Department of the Environment (wearing cap and brassard). Chairman Jeremy Rowe is in the second row.  
(Peterborough Evening Telegraph)

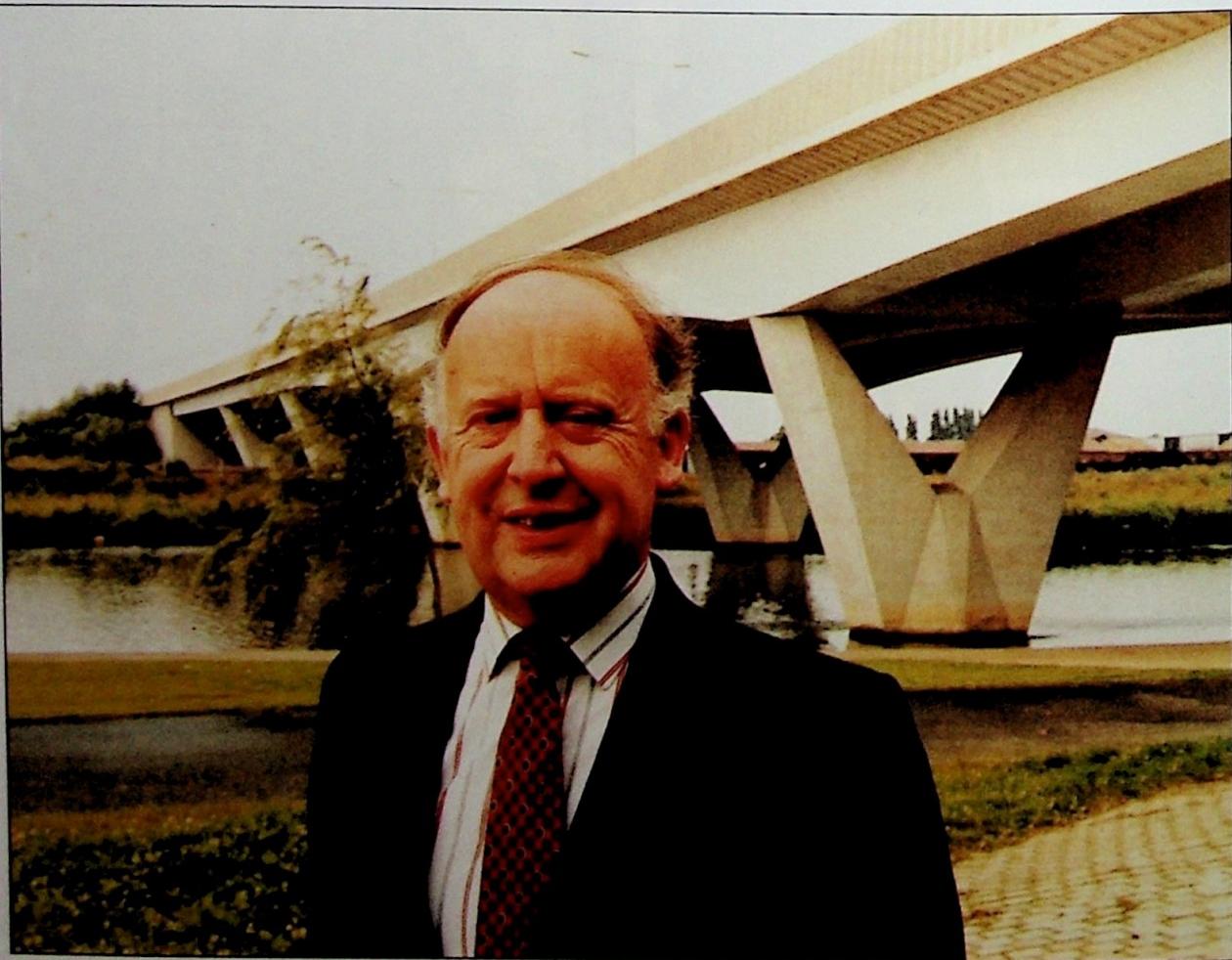


Ken Hutton thought this was excessive. Traffic on that scale would have necessitated three-level parkway junctions and very high costs. The roads were therefore designed on the assumption that 72 per cent of commuters would drive, 11 per cent would go by bus, 10 per cent would bike, and the rest walk.

No prizes for guessing that the forecast levels of car traffic failed to materialise. To start with the repercussions of the 1974 oil crisis resulted in car ownership rising much more slowly than expected. Then the policy switch from new towns to inner cities started by Peter Shore and consummated by Michael Heseltine drastically reduced Peterborough's growth. The target of 186,000 people by 1981 dissolved into the reality of 133,000 by 1988.

Ken Hutton viewed the outcome with equanimity. 'Whereas our roads were forecast to be up to capacity by 1991 it will now probably be 2010 before that happens.' With Britain's fleet of vehicles expected to grow from 21.7 to 27 million in the decade up to 1998, few cities are so fortunate. As Jeremy Rowe said in the corporation's twentieth annual report, Peterborough's road system 'is now almost certainly the finest in the country'. There are Cambridgeshire county engineers who wish it were otherwise and that some of the money spent in Peterborough had gone to Wisbech or elsewhere. Be that as it may, there is no other town in Britain of Peterborough's size with twenty-six miles of parkway.

And for the first-time visitor to the town the parkways are Peterborough. They are an



*Ken Hutton, chief engineer from 1968 to 1984, and Frank Perkins Parkway bridge. The bridge received a design commendation from the Constructional Steelwork Association in 1985.  
(Roger C Austin).*



image of modernity from which occasionally the great Norman hulk of the cathedral – but more often the huge silos of the British Sugar Corporation – can be glimpsed. Ken Hutton recalled too that there was a time when the parkways abolished scepticism. ‘To start with many people didn’t believe we were going to do anything. They thought it was all talk. But that changed – when we built our first bridge across the Nene.’

*Approaching the cathedral and the city centre on Frank Perkins Parkway.*

## 10. FIVE YEARS ON: 1975-1979

The corporation had spent its first five years coping with a succession of economic obstacles. No sooner was one surmounted than another would crop up and the corporation, like the little Dutch boy in the proverb, was constantly running to put a finger into another incipient hole in the dyke.

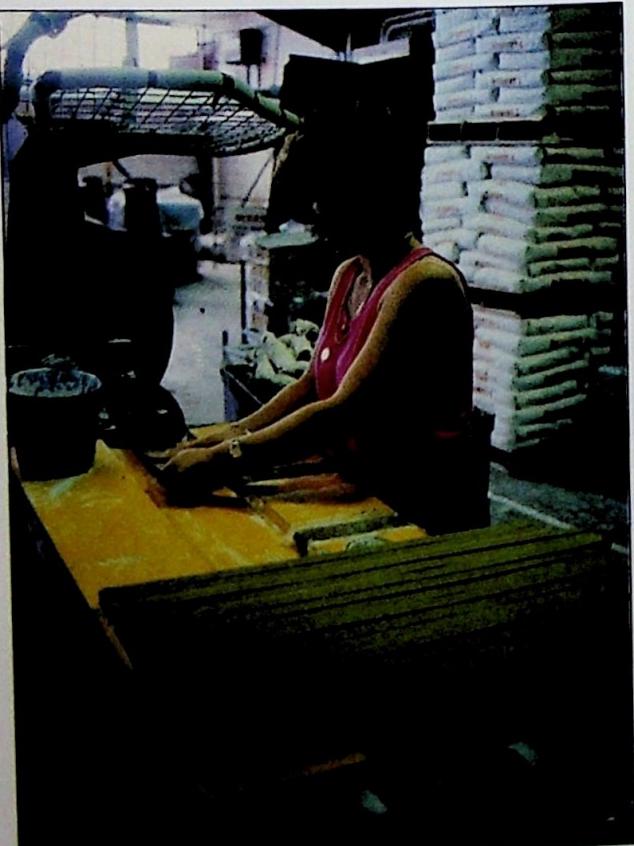
At Westminster the Barber boom had given way to the winter of discontent and in 1974 the second government of Edward Heath was vanquished by Harold Wilson. (In Peterborough Michael Ward defeated Sir Harmar Nicholls and the city returned a Labour MP to Parliament for the first time in twenty-four years.) For the corporation, dependent on the say-so of Westminster for every penny of its spending, the early seventies were years of 'stop-go' and ever higher interest rates. Soaring building costs added to more fundamental difficulties. The costs of housing schemes agreed by the Ministry were frequently topped by the prices tendered by contractors. Items had then to be chopped from the proposed houses to get within the agreed price. Sometimes even lavatory seat covers would be cut from specifications.

There were problems too in getting builders to build for sale. The Peterborough housing market was sluggish. The town was too far from London for commuters, not attractive enough to be a retirement centre and a vast, messy construction camp to boot. As if these difficulties were not enough, the surge in oil prices brought about by the Arabs caused fuel shortages followed by fuel cost inflation.

Notwithstanding these troubles the new town was well under way and by the end of March 1975 an incredible amount had been done. In five years the city's population had been increased by 13,000. In many places too the mud of the early

neighbourhoods had given way to an order composed of houses, parks, trees and shrubs. No fewer than 5,000 houses had been built while drivers were getting used to ten miles of parkways including a second crossing of the River Nene – something Peterborough folk had been impatiently awaiting for forty years.

Few changes were as impressive as the build-up in employment. Sixty new firms had set up in business since April 1970 and the number of jobs in the city had grown by 7,800. Enough factory space had been completed to cover twenty-two



RIGHT: *Peter Pan Playthings*,  
the first company to move into  
a corporation factory.

football fields. 'These are achievements of which we are proud', Christopher Higgins informed Anthony Crosland, the Environment Secretary, in his seventh annual report.

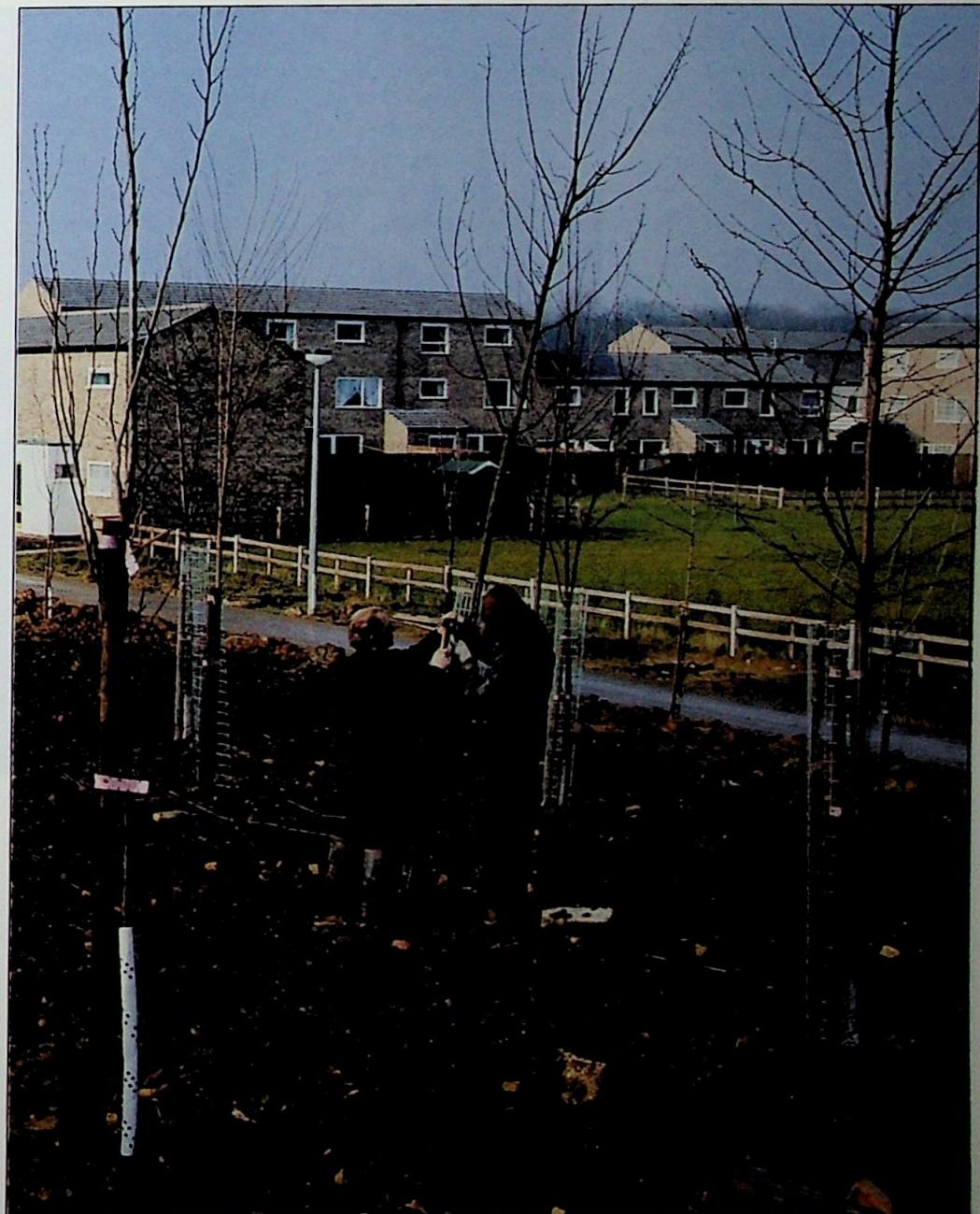
The greening of Peterborough was taking place too. It was high time. The railways, as everywhere, had brought prosperity and left ugliness. All this is shown in the 1950 Ordnance Survey. The main lines and, fanning out from them, not one but three goods marshalling yards, the fattest swollen with over twenty-five coal-blackened sidings, ran like a crude appendix scar across the belly of the town. The scar cried out for cosmetic surgery: the whole town needed uplifting.

The corporation set about this through its huge tree nursery at Castor. By the mid-seventies 120 were employed in planting and pruning while design was handled by a team of twelve landscape architects. The seventy-nine acre nursery acted as a bank for trees and shrubs. It even had a cold store which prolonged the planting season by tricking trees into postponing their spring growth.

In the period up to 1979, when planting peaked, up to 120,000 trees or shrubs a year were shifted to the parkways, the townships and Nene Park. East Anglia's dry, sunny climate (over fifty days a year with more than nine hours of bright sunshine) may have been a comfort to those doing this outdoor work but it also created the risk that the newly planted stocks would dry out.

Over the years the trees have bolted upwards and the bushes have spread outwards to create an all-pervading suburban greenness. There are few formal effects. The use of trees to create vistas and shape views, 'French grandiosity' as Wyndham Thomas called it, is notable for its absence. 'You see that in the French new towns, enormous avenues of trees and major architectural features stretching from the new town outside Paris to the *Arc de Triomphe* inside it.' Milton Keynes has some of that imperial style. Peterborough is more cosy.

**O**ne early decision taken by the corporation was to try and avoid schools becoming educational ghettos tucked away in expensive



isolation behind their fences – their playing fields and swimming pools available only for school games, the shelves of their libraries perused only by juvenile eyes. Henry Morris had, of course, pioneered schools-for-all in Cambridgeshire villages in the 1930s but the idea needed modifying to make it suitable for a new town. Wyndham

Corporation forestry staff  
planting trees at Bretton Park.



Bretton Woods School.

Thomas, former school teacher, and Robin Guthrie, the corporation's first social development officer, later Chief Charity Commissioner, tried to do so.

'I remember sitting up late into the evenings with Robin talking about education as a process which really ought to continue through life. We were very aware of the village colleges in Cambridgeshire but Cambridgeshire was then the county next door. But that tradition was here in this region.'

The chosen solution was to combine the school-building budget of the county with the social amenities funds of the corporation to create community schools – as a number of other education authorities were doing. It followed that the schools were located in township centres and not on remote campuses.

Community schools had a threefold aim: to persuade children to keep up with their education after they had left full-time schooling; to draw

parents into the school for recreation; and to bind, as egg does the friable components of a cake, the uneasy, disparate strangers moving into the new townships. But they also had an economic logic. It was costly to provide sports halls and libraries at schools and then again elsewhere for adults. It spread the available funds thinly and led to mean sports facilities and poorly-stocked library shelves. Combine the available funds of the county and the corporation, marry up the facilities and there was a prospect of achieving bigger and better sports centres and libraries at lower overall cost.

That was the theory. Phil Doran, who took over from Robin Guthrie as social development officer, found that what seemed like such common sense also raised problems. Schools tended to be the dominant partners and to give priority to their use of shared facilities. This was bad for adult users. It was even worse during financial crises since cuts in running costs invari-



*Dickie Jeeps, Chairman of the Sports Council, opening Bushfield Sports Centre in 1979. He is accompanied by, from the left, John Horrell (Chairman of Cambridgeshire County Council Education Committee and a board member), general manager Wyndham Thomas and Jean Barker, city councillor for the Ortons, also a board member.*

ably led to reductions in the weekend opening of pools and sports centres. In such circumstances dual-use could be a complete fiasco with the community as a whole ending up with fewer, not more, amenities.

But these insights came later. A start with dual-use was made at Bretton where the school playing fields were joint funded and used as a public park when school was out. The principle was taken further at Bushfield School at Orton. It included a shared library as well as a shared sports centre and towards this the corporation and the city council contributed no less than £400,000 on a two-for-one basis.

Getting schools of the right kind was a matter of policy; ensuring that they were open and ready for the children was programming. And programming was a juggling act in which the pieces sometimes fell to the floor with a clatter. So it was at Bretton Woods where the school was late and children had initially to be bussed elsewhere. The

source of the problem lay in Whitehall. As Meryl Aldridge, a Nottingham University economist, wrote in the Town and Country Planning Association's journal for February and March 1979: 'The link between individual new towns and the Department of the Environment has been tight, but between new towns . . . and central departments weak.' The link with the Department of Education and Science was particularly weak.

The corporation had tried to deal with this problem before bussing became necessary at Bretton Woods. It had pressed Whitehall to switch funds from its new towns housing budget into its new towns education budget. When this failed to produce results John Horrell, at that time chairman of Cambridgeshire County Council and a corporation board member, led a deputation to the Department of Education. It was highly successful. The Department agreed a capital allocation of £4.9 million which promised 3,450 school places by 1978-79 and thereafter the



*The Royal public house in Westgate, one of the buildings the corporation was directed to conserve by the Secretary of State. Queensgate shopping centre now surrounds it.*

difficulty of getting the schools to open on time diminished.

In the city centre the corporation was involved in another long-running battle to get work under way on its proposed Queensgate shopping centre. It was a high priority. Cathedral Square and Bridge Street were modestly provincial. They were a reflection of the city's past, not of its future as the hub of a region stretching far beyond the confines of the county.

A start on the shopping centre had originally

and optimistically been scheduled for 1975 but preparations, because of their complexity, took longer than expected. Then the corporation ran into difficulties over historic buildings. The Department of the Environment insisted on the preservation of parts of seven buildings the corporation had intended to demolish. There was no choice. Queensgate had to be redesigned to incorporate the listed buildings. It was therefore not until March 1978 that Keith Maplestone's team completed their design and Laing's finally got to work.

The construction of the huge centre inevitably blitzed its surroundings but the corporation sought to offset its blighting effects by widening the pavements in Long Causeway and persuading traders to take part in joint schemes to repaint their shopfronts. British Rail undertook another long overdue city centre improvement – the modernisation of the station. Peter Parker, the railways' chairman, reopened it in September 1980.

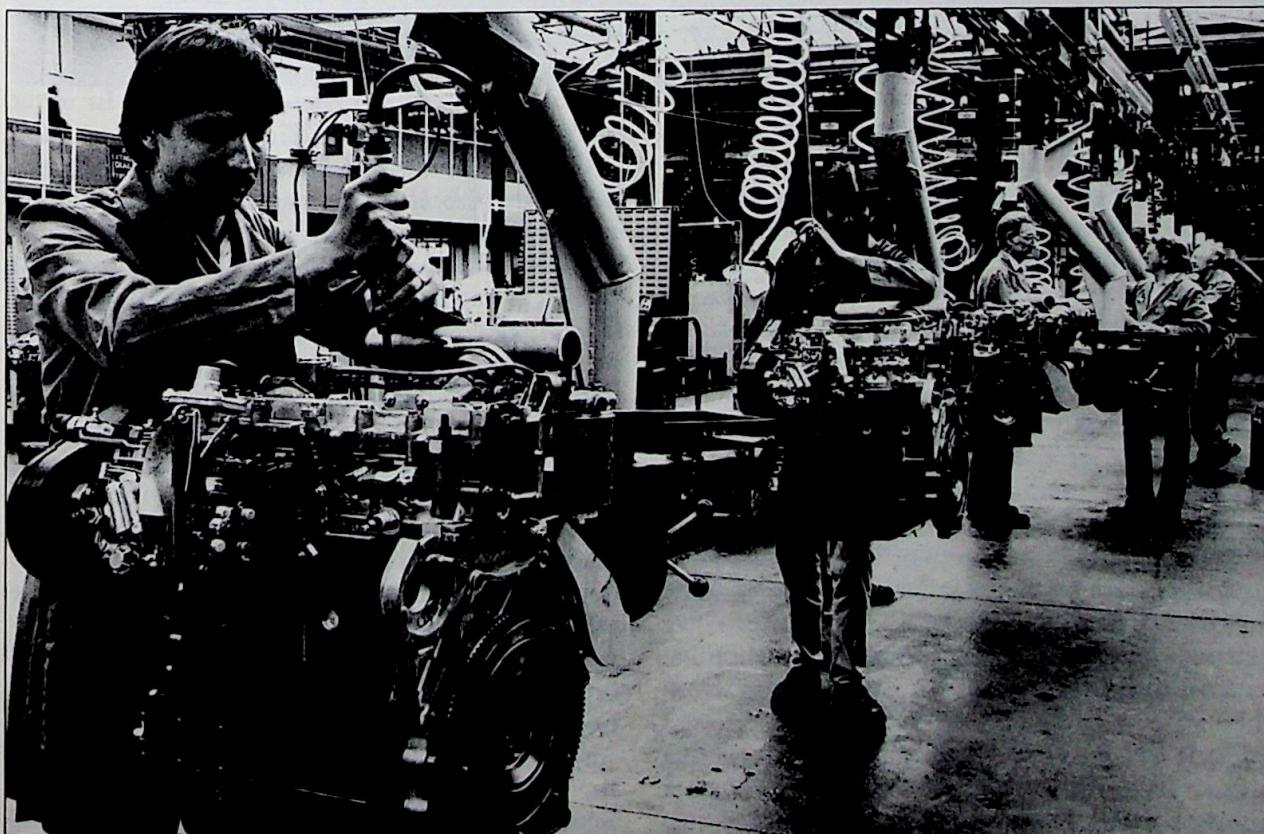
Meanwhile the transformation of Peterborough's labour market was going steadily ahead. Out of the husk of an early twentieth century town dominated by large engineering firms and by jobs for men was emerging a modern town with jobs for women and men in a wide variety of firms. The change was overdue as Ian Purdy, the Cambridgeshire planning officer, pointed out in a 1975 report on *The Strategic Choices Ahead*:

'The chief problem in Peterborough is the

dependence on a limited range of manufacturing industry. Four firms account for 25 per cent of total employment and 62 per cent of manufacturing employment, which probably accounts for the exceptionally high unemployment figures during the current recession.'

However, although engineering in Peterborough had run out of steam, it had certainly not run its term. In 1975 Perkins, the giant diesel engine manufacturer, started building a huge new factory on twenty-five acres at Eastfield while Molins, makers of cigarette manufacturing machines, commissioned Keith Maplestone to design them a plant at Bretton. Molins' spare parts factory, which would eventually employ 800, was the first private commission received by the corporation's architects.

For the corporation, satisfaction at this build-up in the city's economy was offset by the problem of high levels of unemployment. Given



*Fitters at work inside Perkins diesel engine assembly plant.  
(Perkins Engines)*

the presence of so many people on the dole the case for bringing new families into the town was thereby weakened. But unless the production of new houses was slowed down there was a prospect that the corporation would soon be the uneasy owner of hundreds of empty dwellings.

There were two ways to solve the problem. John Case, the chief estates surveyor, was told to redouble his efforts to attract firms from London. The board once again considered cutting back on housing construction. Keith Maplestone, the chief architect, urged the contrary. It was impractical to arrest contracts in progress and as it took eighteen months to design and build houses the effect of slowing the programme would probably not be felt until demand was being pushed up again by the next surge of economic growth.

The corporation decided this time to play cool and go on building – until the following year when a financial crisis at Westminster led the government to freeze all unsigned contracts and enforce a cut in housing starts.

In May 1976 Secretary of State Peter Shore visited Peterborough to welcome the first family to move into a new estate at Paston. (As the new tenants were from Shore's Stepney constituency, his presence to hand over the keys was no coincidence.) Four months later Shore delivered a speech in Manchester that, at the time, seemed to herald the end of the new towns. If it did not quite do that, it certainly marked the beginning of the end.

Wyndham Thomas was with the minister during the Paston visit and got the impression that the man of the hour was Shore's personal private secretary, a young recently-elected MP called Jack Straw. 'He was outraged by the amount of money being spent on the new towns and even more by the way that they seemed to be growing at the expense of the old cities – by getting a disproportionately large share of public expenditure and by pulling people away from them.'

'Jack Straw reacted and over-reacted to that and it was obvious that Shore had been got at because when I went around with him he just

listened. He did not make any comments as ministers usually did.'

There was nothing new in Shore's speech at Manchester town hall on September 17th. The novelty was that what had long been said by others was coming from the mouth of the minister. Shore described the losses of people and jobs over the previous fifteen years and 'the unbalanced nature of the migration, with a disproportionately high number of skilled workers and young people moving out, leaving the inner areas with a disproportionate share of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, of unemployment, of one-parent families, of concentrations of immigrant communities and overcrowded and inadequate housing.'

There was no doubt that the great cities were becoming sinks of poverty. The 1971 census showed that throughout the country as a whole, slightly less than a quarter of the male workforce was unskilled or semi-skilled. In inner Manchester and Glasgow over one-third of all men of working age fell into these categories. In inner Birmingham 38 per cent did.

One interpretation of these abject figures was that a time-bomb of human misery was ticking away in Britain's inner cities which, if nothing was done about it, would erupt in resentment as violent as had been seen in the US in Newark and Detroit during the Nixon administration. This was a view widely held outside government and in the urban deprivation unit set up in the Home Office in 1968.

However when Peter Shore gave figures about migration from the great cities these showed, as the 1966 census had first revealed, that the vast majority of families moving from the cities were going under their own steam and going to private estates in nearby country towns. New and expanding towns were only providing rented houses for one-tenth as many families as were buying their way out.

What about the dwindling number of jobs in the big cities? It turned out that most of those which had disappeared in manufacturing had



*Choosing fish in Brixton Market in Lambeth.* (Lennox Smillie, Camera Press London)

gone as a result of business changes such as mergers, liquidations, closures and automation. Only twenty-seven per cent of those in inner London had moved out, and of them, only one quarter, or one job in fourteen, had gone to the new and expanding towns.

There was no doubt that the bleeding of the great cities was going on but the figures prevented Peter Shore from accusing the new towns of being the leeches. On the contrary he complimented many of their corporations for being 'remarkably successful' at easing pressure on the inner areas.

He went on '... for many city dwellers whose income has prevented them from buying their own home they have provided almost the only chance to set up home in greener and more spacious surroundings. Nor do I think that on the whole the new towns have "stolen" industries which would have otherwise been located in the inner areas.'

Peter Shore nevertheless called for a review of

the role of the new towns and the policy for dispersing people to them.

'It is ironic,' Cullingworth observed, 'that a policy originally conceived as part of a comprehensive strategy for dealing with urban problems should, thirty years later, be subject to attack on the grounds that it had been instrumental in exacerbating these very problems.'<sup>11</sup>

Shore's Manchester speech coincided with a financial crisis at Westminster. The new towns nationally were ordered to cut their 1977 housing output from ten to five thousand: Peterborough had its output cut to 500. Nigel Thorne, assistant director of marketing, recalled the effect of these events. 'The Minister's review was traumatic for Peterborough, the corporation staff, Wyndham Thomas and the new towns movement. It is the most obvious watershed in the corporation's history.'

Christopher Higgins and Wyndham Thomas were not just placemen: they believed fervently in what they were doing. For Higgins, creating

the new town was total fulfilment. 'Until we got together our philosophy didn't emerge, but Peterborough was the job both Wyn and I wanted to do. If you'd got us before to sit down and write about the job we'd like to do, it would have been Peterborough.' So they fought back.

Few people were as well equipped as Wyndham Thomas to do so and he missed no opportunity to advocate Peterborough's case. Two of the corporation's arguments were positive. First, new towns could help Londoners in housing need. In 1976 over fifty families a month had moved from London to rented houses in Peterborough. Two-thirds of these came from overcrowded boroughs. The families of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, the retired parents of new town families, one-parent households and other disadvantaged people were strongly represented amongst them. Second, Peterborough's growth was helping neighbouring fenland, where the industrialisation of farming was causing unemployment, economic distress and decline.

Two of the arguments were defensive. First, the corporation's plans for revitalising the city centre could be jeopardised if expansion was stopped. Second, Peterborough had its own inner city problems. They were of considerable magnitude but would be lessened by adding to the city's jobs and opportunities.

**A** month after Peter Shore's Manchester speech a review of the future development of south-east England was published. This carried on the long-running story started in the early sixties by the South-East Study and the burst of new town building it had set in motion. It had been followed by progressively lower forecasts of the growth of population and, in 1970, by the Strategic Plan for the South-East.

By the mid-seventies further demographic and economic changes were taking place and it was decided to roll forward the thinking in the Strategic Plan. Whitehall and the counties put their heads together and produced a review called the Development of the Strategic Plan for the South-East.

**OPPOSITE:** Environment Secretary Peter Shore gets things moving in the inner city: London docklands, 1977. (BBC Hulton Picture Library)

The result was further reductions in the forecast population. The demographers forecast virtually no population increase in the south-east in the fifteen years up to 1991. The population was expected to remain at about seventeen million.

Yet as the review pointed out all sorts of important changes were still in prospect. The number of people of working age was expected to increase and so was the number of over-seventy-fives. Pressure for development would follow because there would be lots of young people wanting homes and 'a steady trend for the average size of households to decline, with more young people living away from home, more one-parent families and more people living alone...'. The best guess of the demographers was that the average household in the south-east would fall in size from just over three persons in 1961 to only two and a half in 1991. There would be more and more smaller and smaller households.

The implications of this shrinkage in family size for the housing market were momentous. Although the number of households within London was likely to fall in the fifteen years up to 1991, elsewhere in the region the number of extra households to be formed could be as high as three-quarters of a million.

The total growth in households, particularly ones composed of only one person, was actually greater than had been foreseen in 1970 and so the official review stressed the need to allow for development 'on a substantial scale'. The corporation staff responded vigorously. The board was informed that London was soaking up a disproportionate amount of public housing expenditure. In 1974/75 it had absorbed about a third of capital allocated nationally to public housing but produced only one-fifth of the houses. The inference was clear. The job of housing Londoners could be done better and less expensively in Peterborough.

**H**ardly had the development review been dealt with than the board had to digest the Lambeth inner area study – one of four on the

vexed issue of inner cities. Lambeth had been studied by Graeme Shankland and he had found 'relatively high house prices, high densities, widespread multi-occupation, long council waiting lists, squatting and homelessness'.

However Shankland and his colleagues did not share the view that the problems of the inner cities could be solved in the inner cities. The Lambeth people whom they had interviewed had told them as much.

'Our survey showed that between a quarter and a third of households, mostly with children, would move (from inner London) if they could. But the less skilled and less affluent among them, the very people who most need to move to new jobs, have little chance of doing so.'

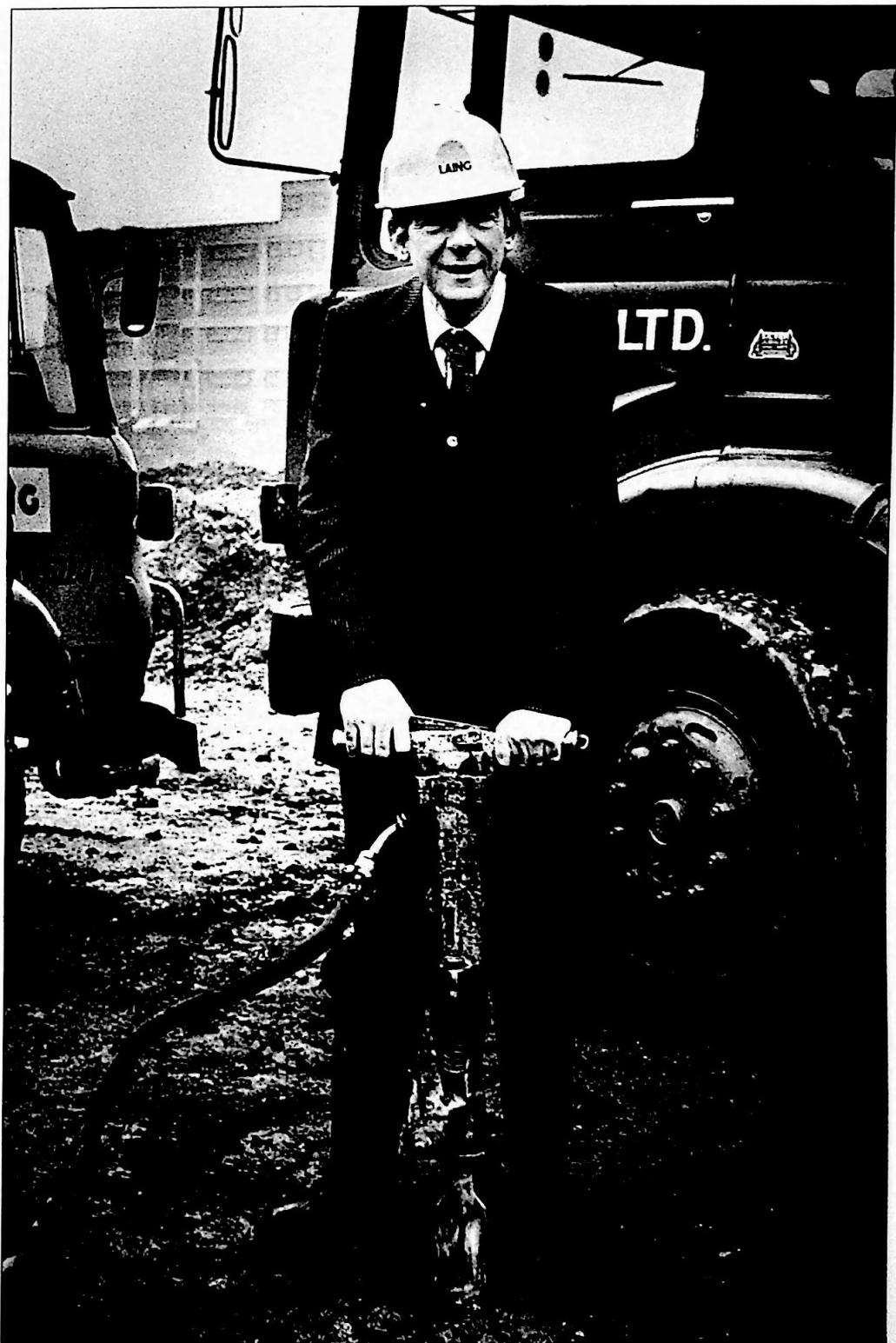
'These families are thus caught in what we call the "housing trap". The choices available to them are owner-occupied houses, which they cannot buy, and public housing, to which they are denied access.'

Shankland went on to list the benefits that would flow from springing the housing trap and added: 'We do not believe that further dispersal will impoverish London: a less congested London should be cheaper to run.' But he doubted whether the new towns had real potential to help the poorest families. They were too far from London.

Wyndham Thomas was stung by this last observation into writing the finest housing policy paper of his time as Peterborough's general manager. And he persuaded Fred Roche and John Weston, his opposite numbers at Milton Keynes and Northampton, to co-sign it.

The paper showed that during 1976 the three new towns had housed 2,238 London households of which just over a thousand were in one way or another disadvantaged. It went on to suggest that over the following ten years the three corporations would be able to house no fewer than 22,500 more poor and ill-housed London families.

The advocacy of the new towns fell on deaf ears. The events set in train by Peter Shore in his Manchester speech saw their conclusion at Easter 1977. The Secretary of State told Parliament that





*Private houses on corporation land at Bretton.*

he intended to cut 20,000 off Peterborough's 'target' population, 50,000 off Northampton's and 50–70,000 off Milton Keynes'. Extensions to three of the earlier London new towns, Harlow, Stevenage and Bracknell, were cut too.

The statement was followed in June by a White Paper *Policy for the Inner Cities* (Cmnd. 6854) which set out measures to improve the economy and environment of inner areas, to alleviate social problems and to secure 'a new balance (in population and jobs) between the inner areas and the rest of the city region'.

The White Paper beat the drum for private investment in the inner cities in a very eighties way and set out Peter Shore's idea for urban regeneration through central and local government partnerships. It urged houses for sale and

houses with gardens in the inner cities. Turning to the new towns it said:

'Some resources will be redeployed for the benefit of inner city areas, but over the next seven or eight years the momentum of new town development will be substantially maintained.' As the Treasury had always recognised, garden cities, unlike garden taps, could not be turned off at the flick of a wrist, not even a ministerial wrist.

'There remains a need', the White Paper added, 'for the new towns to do more to relieve directly the stress areas in the inner cities by taking more of those who have retired, or are chronically sick or disabled – together with those unskilled or unemployed workers who are willing to move and whose prospects of employment will not be worsened by moving.'

The Peterborough partnership had responded to Peter Shore after his Easter statement. The county had accepted the 20,000 cut in population. Councillors saw it reducing the demands of London problem families on their social services. The city and the corporation took the contrary view. They wanted to keep the original population target. However, the partnership did express collective anxiety about the prospect of having to accept additional disadvantaged Londoners. Such households already accounted for over four out of ten of incoming families. Cambridgeshire's social services could not cope with more. A higher proportion also threatened to unbalance the social structure of the townships.

In retrospect it is clear that Peterborough had got off lightly. No other new town suffered such a small reduction in its population target. Castor township had not been lost. It could still go ahead although on a smaller scale and only to the north of the A47 road. To the corporation it seemed that the redevelopment of the city centre was secure and that a decade of development lay ahead.

Reviewing the year of the cuts in his tenth annual report, Christopher Higgins pointed out that forty per cent of the planned growth had been achieved. Public investment in the new town stood at £250 million, five thousand more jobs were in prospect, seven thousand more London families would be housed.

Yet even more profound changes were on the

way. Following the general election of 1979 and the return of a Conservative government, Michael Heseltine became Secretary of State for the Environment. The new government was committed to rolling back the frontiers of the state and, above all else, to reducing the growth of public expenditure. The new towns were instructed to sell their houses and to build in future only for the elderly or other special needs.

The corporation protested against the government's stop on rented housing. It undermined the very foundations of new town development. The presence of houses empty and waiting was what persuaded firms to move. And it was the inflow of such firms and their jobs that made new towns 'self-contained communities' in the Ebenezer Howard mould. Without them new towns were in danger of becoming mere dormitories - commuter suburbs.

Another important implication flowed from the stop on building houses for rent. With the prospect that the number of lettings available would be eaten away by the sale of dwellings, so Peterborough's already diminished contribution to helping ill-housed Londoners was bound to dwindle still further. It was the end of an era.

The corporation shook itself like a great animal. Board members and executives alike, many of them social democrats by instinct, public housers by practice, forced themselves to adjust to the new economic climate of Thatcherism. They had no choice. They were an arm of government.

## 11. FROM HOUSES FOR RENT TO HOUSES FOR SALE

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**W**hen I came here at the end of 1970 looking for a house, I was staggered at the narrow range. It was something I had never encountered; never even thought about.'

Donald MacDonald had been appointed as the corporation's assistant chief finance officer and he needed a roof over his head. His recollection of what he found is born out by the facts. Just as the economy of the city was akin to that of a northern manufacturing town, so its choice of houses was limited and mostly down-market. Indeed from 1965 until 1970 the activities of housebuilders in the city actually declined. This was only a local phenomenon so perhaps the builders were scared by the news that Peterborough was to become a new town. The same period saw the builders in full flush in the rural districts adjoining the city.

Once the new town got under way all this began to change. The Mulhern family, the first to move in, had wanted to buy a house or flat in Islington but the prices were too high. At Ravensthorpe in the new town, they first rented and then bought their corporation house. Later they sold it and bought another at Gullymore in a small private estate about a mile away in Bretton.

The corporation set out from the first to assist this kind of self-improvement but it was not easy. Housing policy as set by Westminster was as stable as a roller-coaster. Under Edward Heath's government in the early seventies it swooped in the direction of home ownership and market forces; then under James Callaghan it climbed back towards renting and government control; finally, with the coming of Margaret Thatcher in 1979, it reverted, with greatly increased vigour, towards ownership and market conditions.

When the corporation began building in 1970 there were about 30,000 dwellings within the

boundaries of the new town. Fewer than a third of them belonged to local authorities and there was a substantial pool of private rentals.

The corporation's statisticians calculated how many additional houses would be needed in two steps. First they worked out that the population of the town would grow by about 100,000. Then they made assumptions about how many households all those people would form.

In the sixties households were already shrinking in size as a result of a multitude of changes in the way people lived. Young marrieds (and young people generally) were showing less and less inclination to lodge with their parents. Grandparents were likewise choosing to be independent rather than live with their sons and daughters – and were living longer too. Then there was divorce and the rise of the 'single-parent family', another cause of more and smaller households.

When all these changing aspects of life were taken into account, the best estimate was that there would be 3.2 persons in the average Peterborough household in the period of the new town. When applied to the forecast population increase this gave rise to a need for about 29,000 additional houses – or roughly a doubling of the 1970 stock.

The Reith committee had made it clear way back in 1946 that new towns ought to be composed of a mix of homeowners and tenants, exactly as old towns were. Yet by the mid-sixties the vast majority of new town residents were tenants. Was this an economic inevitability – given the prevailing relationship between wages and house costs? Or was it a product of the mind-set of politicians at Westminster and the convictions of the board members of the corporations? Whatever the answer to those questions,

the mid-sixties saw a review of tenure in new towns and in August 1967 (Anthony Greenwood was the housing minister) the department published a circular in which an objective of 50 per cent owner-occupation was set for all post-1961 new towns.

The Treasury was keen on the new policy because it promised to trim the ever-rising cost of the new towns. The builders' federation was less keen. It thought that incentives would be needed to get private building under way and proposed that sites should be sold to builders on deferred payment terms. Peterborough was later to do precisely this.

The following year saw the publication of Professor Barry Cullingworth's report on the ownership and management of new town houses.<sup>26</sup> This showed that over half of all tenants in new towns wanted to buy but that relatively few could afford to do so. 'This was not because incomes were unusually low (on the contrary) but because new town houses were unusually expensive (5 to 10 per cent higher than in the country as a whole).'

Cullingworth was a decade ahead of his time. Not only did he propose selling corporation houses at a discount to offset their expensiveness but he stressed the importance of bringing in

*The dream of home ownership.*



*Corporation-built houses in Bretton approached on one side by footpaths.*



housing associations as alternative landlords and of finding ways to enable builders to build cheaper houses for sale.

On the question of housing choice Cullingworth re-emphasised what Reith had said two decades earlier. '...the most desirable pattern of tenure', he wrote, 'is one which provides the widest range of choice to the consumer, meets the needs of all groups in the community, involves the least charge on public funds (consistent with helping the needy), and presents the fewest obstacles to mobility.'

The cogency of the ownership and management report led to proposals for a new circular, a first draft of which unleashed a storm of controversy in Whitehall. In the eye of the storm lay Radburn housing layouts and Parker Morris

housing standards – both fundamental tenets of progressive town planning and housing in the sixties – but both fundamental causes too of the high cost of corporation houses.

Radburn was a New Jersey town designed in 1929 to make living safe amidst the hurtling steel of the first American motor age. Radburn's houses faced one way on to cul-de-sac roads and the other on to footways which underpassed the busier roads and led to parks and schools in the midst of every neighbourhood. Pedestrians and motors were by this means almost completely isolated from one another.

The Wall Street crash prevented the completion of Radburn but the principles of its design left, for a time, an indelible imprint on town planning theory. Modified Radburn was widely

adopted in the new towns and when John Cresswell became chief architect at Peterborough he applied the principle of the separation of pedestrians and cars (the essence of Radburn) to Bretton. Keith Maplestone had other ideas, and when he took over from Cresswell, things began to change.

The rise and fall of Radburn was the result of a mixture of influences. Providing access to the fronts and the backs of houses was expensive and, at the densities customary in Britain, difficult to achieve throughout an estate. English densities also necessitated the transformation of Radburn's cul-de-sac roads into garage courts, which were at best bleak and at worst hideous.

The nub of the issue was that the corporation's tenants (and council tenants generally) were more and more tending to be car owners. Keith Maplestone recalled that this trend led to a great debate within the corporation offices. Should garages be provided with rented houses? That was the question. Maplestone supplied an answer. 'They were only renting the houses but they had bought cars and they wanted to put them right outside the front window. You could cater for it, or ignore it.'

Maplestone chose to cater for it which meant rejecting the Radburn idea of safety through segregation. In its place came houses arranged around paved courtyards and narrow estate roads designed to be shared by people and vehicles. Estate planning along these lines was pioneered at Runcorn in the late sixties. In the seventies planning committees in Essex and then Cheshire used design handbooks to push the same concept amongst the housebuilders. In all cases the assumption was that lanes, cul-de-sacs and courtyards in which drivers are obliged to go slowly would be safe for pedestrians, children and cyclists. It was no coincidence that the new layouts also demanded the 'urbanity' which architects had advocated in the fifties.

Keith Maplestone's more open, 'courtyard-planned' houses did not begin to appear until about two years after his appointment in 1972 but when they did the difference was speedily noticed by the *Evening Telegraph*. The paper

billed Maplestone as 'The man who lets the sky in'. Not long after the government ended the argument about garages. It forbade them on grounds of their cost.

If Radburn was an imported concept Parker Morris housing standards were decidedly home grown. *Homes for Today and Tomorrow* (HMSO 1961), the report of a committee chaired by Sir Parker Morris, contained the careful measurement of a hundred and one mundane domestic activities ranging from putting on a shirt in the bathroom, to steering the pram past the aspidistra in the hall. These ergonomic facts and other measurements of the overflowing possessions of a new generation of consumers, led to the definition of space standards for everything from bathrooms (in which you could don a shirt without barking your knuckles) to bedroom cupboards.

The standards also made houses more expensive. Parker Morris houses were not luxurious but substantially better than what had gone before and above what first time private buyers could afford. In a world where the capital cost and the rents of council houses were both subsidised Parker Morris was, as the Treasury persistently reminded the Ministry of Housing, awkwardly expensive.

New towns, which had a tradition of pushing for quality, adopted Parker Morris enthusiastically in the sixties. The Cabinet, faced with reconciling the irreconcilable – the boundless spending ambitions of housing (and other) ministers and national solvency – squared the circle. First came the Housing Subsidies Act 1967, which reintroduced 'cost yardsticks' designed to force economy upon housing authorities. (They were first used by Sir Keith Joseph in 1963.) Then in 1969 came an instruction to all housing authorities to adopt Parker Morris space and heating standards.

At the time of Cullingworth's 1968 report on ownership and management and the draft circular it prompted, the housing yardsticks had not begun to bite. It was still the high noon of the sixties, a decade that had seen architects of talent



*Privately-built houses arranged around a brick-paved courtyard.*

and imagination given freedom to design public housing as never before. The draft circular seemed to put all that at risk. Not only did it hold out the prospect of private builders flooding the new towns with mean dwellings of inferior design, but it suggested that some corporations, in the course of exercising development control powers, were forcing Radburn and Parker Morris on those whom they condescendingly saw as 'spec' builders'. Minutes purple with indignation flew to and fro within the corridors of power.

'I would remind you that "jerry building", "by-pass variegated" and "stockbrokers' tudor" are some of the epithets which have passed into

the language and which apply exclusively to the private enterprise field,' one Ministry of Housing official wrote in defence of public housing and of the new towns' way of doing things.<sup>11</sup>

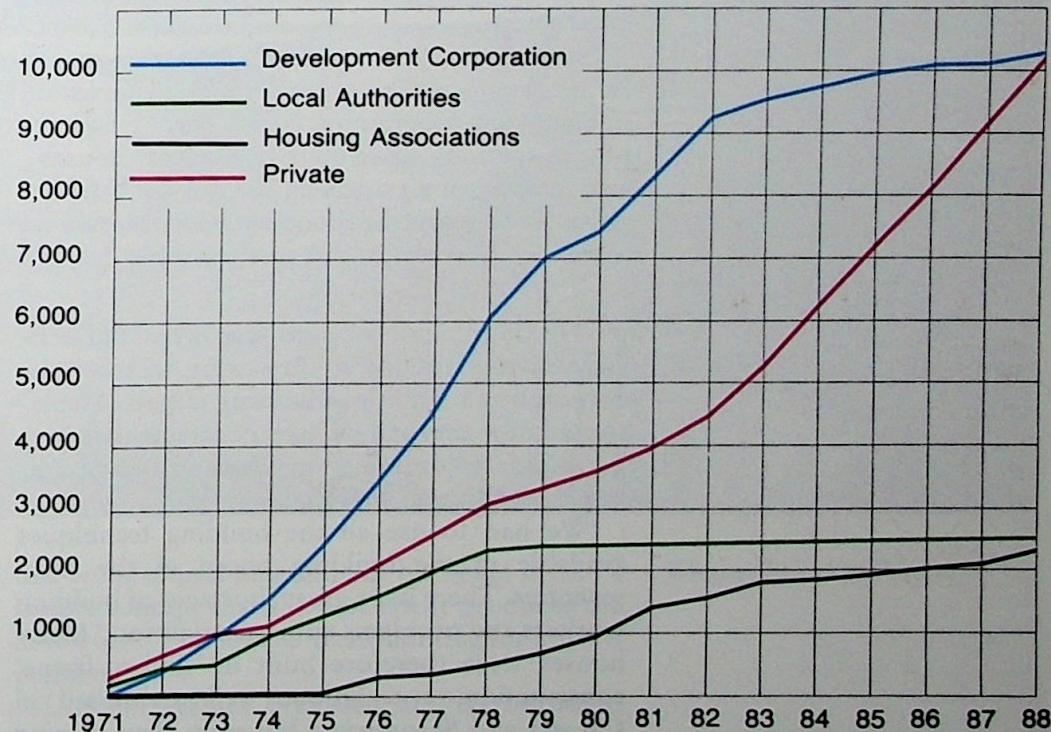
The power of Cullingworth's arguments nevertheless guaranteed that, in one form or another, a circular designed to unleash the potential of private house builders would be issued. December 1968 saw its publication. Emphasis was put on developers' briefs that would be 'flexible and realistic and . . . designed to obtain the highest possible standards of layout and house type consistent with the price level aimed at'. Such briefs would indicate house prices but not design solutions.

Cullingworth's idea of offering new town tenants discounts to assist them to buy their houses did not survive the transformation of the controversial circular. Treasury could not agree to selling assets at below their market values however hard housing ministry officials argued the social and political advantages of doing so. The general election of 1970 changed that. Peter Walker, the first Secretary of State in Edward Heath's monster Department of the Environment, introduced a 20 per cent discount for new town tenants (bringing them into line with council tenants). The Heath government also started to sweep away generations of subsidies for buildings and replace them with rent rebates or subsidies for people.

The object of the new approach to housing subsidies was to push rents towards market levels. Peter Walker said it was also intended to channel money to those who most needed it. 'These changes in housing finance are the first major steps towards changing the course of housing in Britain, the biggest and most far-reaching revolution in fifty years.' The economic foundations of the shift from tenancy to ownership had been laid.

Peterborough Development Corporation was born in the midst of this revolution in national housing policy and, as an instrument of government, became a vehicle for it. The master plan emphasised choice. The corporation undertook 'to ensure ... that people can find, when they need it, a home in which they would choose to live.' This meant promoting houses for sale. It meant too that no sooner did the corporation finish building houses to rent, than it offered them to their tenants for sale.

Wyndham Thomas found no difficulty in working within the guidelines of the Heath government. He welcomed the selling of corporation houses. 'There was no doubt that people would look after them better. They would feel they had a better stake in the place.' There was a further reason for encouraging home ownership. With the city council owning about 10,000 houses and the corporation likely to build even



TOP: Cumulative total of houses built by different agencies in Peterborough.

ABOVE: Contribution to total housing output of different agencies.

more, there was a danger of Peterborough becoming a vast municipal housing estate. Experience suggested that this was not a good prospect.

Despite these concerns the corporation's remit left little choice but to build huge numbers of houses to rent. However in 1972, when inflation caused tenders wildly to exceed the yardsticks and there was a prospect, as local firms laid off men, that housing output might exceed new jobs,

the board placed a halt on housing contracts. It happened just as Maplestone took up his post as chief architect. 'I walked into the office and straight into a gloomy lot of faces. "What do we do, lads," I asked. They answered that the board had just stopped them building houses.'

Eighteen months later Gerry Burns, the housing manager, found himself reaping the whirlwind. The supply of houses dwindled to a trickle. 'There was a period of two to three years when I was quoting a year's delay in housing people. We really had a bad time.' Keith Maplestone had foreseen this problem and subsequently advised the board against stopping housing production.

Burns recalled that when the second recession came they stood their ground. 'We said we would not cut our programme back. Then I had the other situation – up to 600 or 700 empty houses – and people were criticising us. But we held our ground and when the economy took off again we were in a position to respond quickly.'

**C**ontinuity not stop-go was what the contractors needed if they were to meet the corporation's ambitious housing targets. Maplestone knew this and devised contracts that gave the builders continuity of work in both traditional and system building.

'We had to use all the building techniques available in the building boom of the early seventies. There were great shortages of building workers and problems with materials too.' Many houses were therefore built in 'timber frame' construction, a technique well-established in Canada and Scandinavia but only then coming into widespread use in Britain.

Timber frame houses, as the name suggests, were based on factory-built wooden armatures that could be quickly erected on concrete slabs and then covered with a skin of bricks. The collapse of Ronan Point had dealt a death-blow to building systems based on room-sized factory-made concrete panels, but timber frame houses, though partly pre-fabricated, had no stigma attached to them.

Maplestone did, nevertheless, sometimes have

to advise the board to go for system-built concrete houses. It happened when his staff were working on Paston and tenders were coming in way over the yardstick limit. The builders were making more money elsewhere and were not interested in building houses within tightly drawn government cost limits. The special conditions of the new town created special difficulties.

The yardsticks set down cost limits for every type of house and flat and were adjusted, region by region, every year. These regional adjustments were related, as Maplestone found to his dismay, to the prevailing building costs in the different regions. 'The East Midlands (in which Peterborough was located) were traditionally a low-cost region but the scale of work going on in the new town meant that we had to attract builders from outside the region. And their tenders reflected their experience of costs elsewhere.'

Faced with an impossible situation Maplestone visited Wimpey's regional manager at Nottingham to persuade him to undertake a contract at Paston. 'He said, "OK, provided we build with *Nofines*, start when we want and work at our pace". The board were not happy, but when told they had no choice they bit the bullet.'

The *Nofines* houses were built by pouring concrete into reusable steel forms. Their name was due to the absence of fine sand in the concrete mix of which they were built. Maplestone had a high opinion of them. 'They were the only form of concrete housing I considered had all the criteria of soundness, quality and long life.' The people living in the pebbledashed houses off Paston Ridings agreed with him. They soon began to buy their concrete houses.

**B**y the mid-seventies Maplestone and his staff were volume builders. 'We ended up ... letting contracts for 2,000 houses per year – a rate necessary to complete the entire new town, including Castor, by 1985. It was only political decisions by changing governments which dramatically reduced and finally stopped the rented programme.'

All this began at Ravensthorpe, the estate



which prompted the outcry about brown bricks. Other estates followed for a decade giving an ultimate total of 10,300 dwellings of which 600 were bungalows for elderly people. The peak year for building was 1977 which saw over 1,500 completions. After that output declined except for a brief revival in 1981–1982 when the corporation was allowed to build houses for sale.

The wide difference between the houses at Milton Keynes and Peterborough illustrates the latitude in design available to the corporations. Both new towns had to cope with housing cost yardsticks which forced densities up and cut specifications down, but at MK the emphasis was on innovation in architecture. Derek Walker, the chief architect, was after an image of modernity and sought designers with star quality. He told

one architectural magazine of his belief in ‘... a simple concept that the best talent produces the best work.’ This lead to ‘head-hunting for known performers...’<sup>27</sup>

Different values prevailed at Peterborough. John Dunham, the first deputy chairman had a building society background and convinced chairman Christopher Higgins that everything the corporation built to rent should be designed as if it was to be sold. That was one damper on architectural experiment. Wyndham Thomas’s fervent belief in garden cities was another. Garden cities are not places where the houses of ordinary people are used as test-beds for theories about design in the first machine-age. They are about cottages, gardens and winding lanes – traditional English housing values.

*Wimpey houses at Paston.*

John Dunham's goal of saleability was turned into a rule of thumb by requiring the architects to design houses to achieve an assumed market value no less than their construction costs. Wyndham Thomas attached great importance to the influence of this concept even though its proper working was obstructed by the cost yardsticks.

'If you crammed houses together you reduced privacy and increased the feel of public housing. So we went for the best internal space standards we could. We went for the biggest gardens we could. We went for the best privacy we could get. You will, I think, see more strong, close-board fencing in Peterborough than in any other new town. We sought to give our houses the appearance of good spec' built estates.'

The cost yardsticks were in constant conflict with these objectives because their effect was to force the architects to crowd houses together and cut down the size of their gardens. There was not much room for manoeuvre but Maplestone and his staff did what they could. 'A lot turned on the way we allocated open space. Where we had to have shorter gardens we tried to ensure that there was open space at the ends of them.' This reduced the feeling of crowdedness.

However it was by no means always possible to offset the effects of the dreaded yardsticks. In parts of North Bretton the architects were forced to cut the specification and the tenants did not take long to discover where. They had moved in, gone down to Sainsbury's, got chatting with other corporation tenants and compared houses. They found one particularly humiliating difference, as Gerry Burns discovered a short time after the houses were first occupied.

'A woman rang up and said: "I've checked with my neighbours. We haven't got lavatory-seat covers and they have." So they demanded a public meeting. I went along and there must have been about forty people crammed into the living-room of a house. I kept saying things like – "In Phase I we had this, in Phase II we had that, and in Phase III we were subject to economic pressures and were forced to make cuts".

'They said: "We don't care about your phasing

problems. We want the same as everybody else. We are going to form an association to insist that the cuts are made good." They called it Phase III and put on so much pressure that we had to take money out of the revenue account to provide the extra bits that had been left out.'

External pressures from the yardsticks and internal pressures to get houses built both tended to force quality downwards, but the corporation's high standards and the skill of the architects cushioned Burns and his housing managers from disasters. 'In general I'm pleased with the totality of the stock. It is as good as anywhere in the country. There are no horrors.'

The drive for comfortable, conventional, saleable houses also kept at bay such adventures in architectural wonderland as flat roofs and plastic cladding (though not a technically important experiment in air-to-air rather than water-to-air solar heating). This moderation may have reduced to three the number of design awards the corporation received, but it avoided the later embarrassment of having to replace flat by pitched roofs. Not all new towns were so fortunate.

Peterborough's architectural story starts with the plain, almost severe designs of Ravensthorpe and Bretton which were designed under John Cresswell. They have about them a hint of what Tom Wolfe, in *From Bauhaus to Our House*, called 'worker housing' – that heady mixture of revolutionary socialist politics and revolutionary modern design which started to sweep across Europe in the twenties.

Under Keith Maplestorne, a garden city man, the houses became cosier and began to sport such traditional features as dormers, bracketed porches and panelling. Hermann Muthesius, were he to return to write a sequel to *Das englische Haus*, would instantly recognise them for what they are – a reversion to that tradition, which he wrote about in the 1890s, when the comfort of English suburban houses was unequalled in Europe.

Gerry Burns attributed this evolution from

penny plain to tuppence coloured as much to the yardsticks as the architects. '... variety is something people like. To start with we didn't have it but the later schemes are very attractive. Somehow we managed to manipulate the yardstick to provide a better product.'

But as Keith Maplestone noted, architectural fashion was a force in the drawing-office and, during the period the new town was being designed, was changing from the fag-end of new brutalism to the first flowering of post-modernism. Changes in design also reflected variations in the workload in his office. 'Numbers were crucial in the seventies. We were building as fast as we could. But as the volume fell away we

were able to spend a lot more time at the drawing-board', Maplestone explained.

When all this has been taken into account what emerges is a tale of prudent housebuilding rather than wild artistic experiment. Keith Maplestone and his fellow designers kept their more dramatic statements for public buildings such as Orton town centre – which is exactly as F. J. Osborn would have had it.

**M**rs Thatcher's election in 1979 brought to full fruit the ideas set in motion by Edward Heath at the beginning of the seventies. The new towns were told to look to the market and not the Treasury for finance. They were told to promote

*Houses at Orton built by the corporation.*



houses for sale and to stop building houses to rent.

The corporation set about the new objectives with a will. There were four main ways to increase home-ownership. Step up the sale of corporation houses. Attract additional private builders to Peterborough by offering them risk-reducing financial partnerships. Make house purchase more attractive to people with modest incomes. And, finally, reach out to those for whom the ownership of a house was still a dream.

The corporation wasted no time in boosting the sale of its own houses. Letters were sent to tenants on the occasion of yearly rent increases

telling them how much their weekly outgoings would be if they took out mortgages. Meetings were set up on Friday evenings to explain the niceties of house purchase. A 'buy and move' scheme was introduced. Then an obstacle appeared. Sales were getting bogged down in the detailed technical work involved in transferring ownership.

Neville Smallman, the chief legal officer, found a solution to the problem. He worked out a way to make the intending buyer effectively the owner within four weeks. If something untoward was subsequently discovered during searches, it was covered by indemnities given by the corpor-

*Houses at Werrington built by the corporation.*



ation to purchasers through their professional advisors.

The pay-off for the resourcefulness was recalled by Wyndham Thomas. 'We were fastest away at Peterborough and I think Peterborough still holds the record for having sold the highest proportion of its stock.'

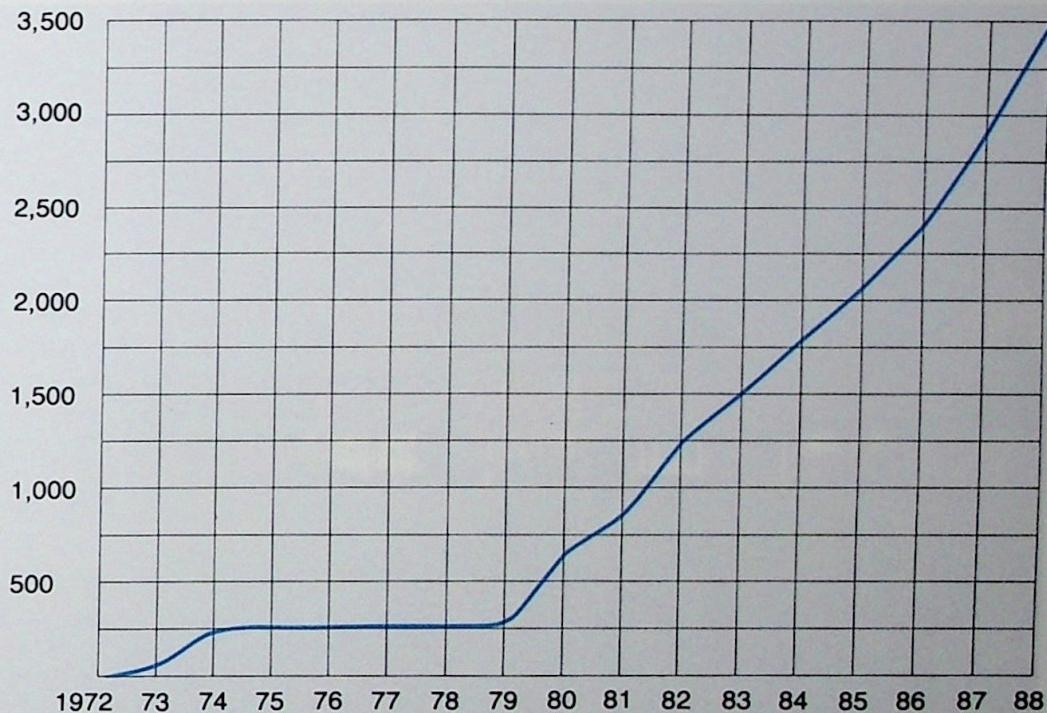
By 1988 the corporation had sold one-third of its houses, a transfer of property advertised, not necessarily to universal acclaim, by the panelled doors, wicket fencing and stick-a-stone facades added by proud owners to their new possessions.

The implications of this change in the ownership of a large part of the corporation's housing stock were far-reaching. The availability of two to three hundred empty houses had always been important in selling Peterborough to firms. If incoming workers had to buy houses, would they be able to afford them? And would the house builders be able to respond quickly enough to surges in demand? In the event the corporation found that most of its fears were unfounded, that it could work effectively with the private house builders and that an increased supply of houses for sale was good for existing residents as well as newcomers.

During the seventies the private house builders had built only about 350 homes a year and many of these were on privately owned sites. On corporation owned sites as few as 529 houses for sale had been completed up to the end of 1979. David Bath's department then got to work and David Morgan, a town planner who later became chief executive of the Black Country Urban Development Corporation, was given the task of feeding sites to the housebuilders. Sites were identified, planning briefs prepared for them and sales negotiated. In no time twenty firms were building houses for sale.

Deferred payment for sites, as suggested by Cullingworth in 1968, was introduced too. Land was sold to builders under licence. They paid only a 10 per cent deposit to obtain access to the property. They paid the balance plot by plot as the houses were sold.

Partnership between the corporation and the



house builders, coupled with the increasingly buoyant economy of the eighties, produced impressive results. In 1979 six to seven hundred houses for sale a year were thought to be a difficult but attainable target. In 1987 thirty-six different firms of builders completed 1,092 houses for sale.

Making house purchase more attractive to people of modest means involved action of two kinds: trying to keep house prices down; and financial instruments that had the effect of making houses less expensive. The housing market could also be lubricated with improved information. A 'Homebuyer Centre' was accordingly set up in the city centre in 1982.

The array of financial instruments used by the corporation to further the objectives of the government's 'right to buy' legislation is mind boggling. Under 'equity sharing' the buyer acquired the bricks and mortar of a house but not the plot on which they stood. The cost of the plot was covered, in effect by an interest-free loan of up to £4,000 from the corporation. Under 'easybuy' the corporation built and rented 516

*Cumulative sales of corporation houses to tenants. During the period from 1974 to 1979 the Labour government did not allow sales.*



*Lakeside privately-built houses at Werrington.*

neat little starter homes at Werrington thereby making their occupants eligible for tenants' discounts. The occupants could also continue to pay rent for whatever share of the value of their houses they were initially unable to afford to buy.

When 'easybuy' came to an end for corporation-built houses the principles of it were reintroduced as 'homeshare' to help people buy privately-built houses.

In other initiatives, some involving housing

associations, houses were built and sold without profit. Under one scheme, 253 small houses were sold at a price that undercut private builders by at least fifteen per cent. Under another the corporation provided a serviced site at no cost and a financial guarantee to enable North Housing Association to build 200 houses to let on 'assured tenancies'.

Inevitably, the emphasis put by the government on home buying, coupled with the ending of the corporation's building to let, had a drastic

effect on the availability of lettings. By 1988 the corporation was selling its own houses at the rate of 600 a year and producing only 350 new lettings. Accommodation was, as Gerry Burns said, 'desperately short'.

Initiatives such as that of the North Housing and other associations, all based mainly on private funds, were the only source in sight of low-cost housing for sale and rent. If it was a new housing frontier, which was not impossible, it was one still only dimly perceived.

Once the private builders dominated the supply of houses in Peterborough, the design of what they produced could be influenced by development control or by holding competitions in which the winner was chosen on design as well as price. Urged on by Ken Hutton, the general manager, the corporation decided to hold a competition for distinctive high quality houses on a well-located site in Orton. In other

towns, further from the fens, the slight rise on the site might not have been noticed, in Peterborough it was called The Hill.

The corporation got precisely what it wanted. Twelve firms entered and the winners were Beazer Monsell Youell Homes. The Hill houses, with their upstairs windows carefully placed to get views of the Nene valley, conjured up memories of the Portmerion of Clough Williams-Ellis and late-Victorian, Italianate villas. They were decidedly post-modern and sold in 1988 for about £170,000. David Bath was enthusiastic about them.

'They are houses you love or hate. A number of people have told me, "God, I hate them!" I'm in the other camp. I think they are great fun and I don't think it is our job as a planning authority to deny people fun houses if they want them. I think it is appropriate for us to accept designs of this kind in the right location.'

Peterborough Development Corporation's single most important task was building or



Houses built for sale at Muskhamb in Bretton.



promoting the building of houses. When the corporation set out in 1968 it foresaw a need for 29,000 houses for an increase in the city's population of about 100,000. Peter Shore and then Michael Heseltine ensured that the population grew only by about 50,000. Yet the number of houses built was about 25,500.

This unexpected out-turn was the result of the shrinking of household sizes. The forecast that the average household would contain 3.2 people turned out to be wide of the mark. By 1987 the average was down to 2.4 people – and still falling. It was a local form of the fewer-people-but-more-houses phenomenon that was putting pressure on the home counties and the London green belt.

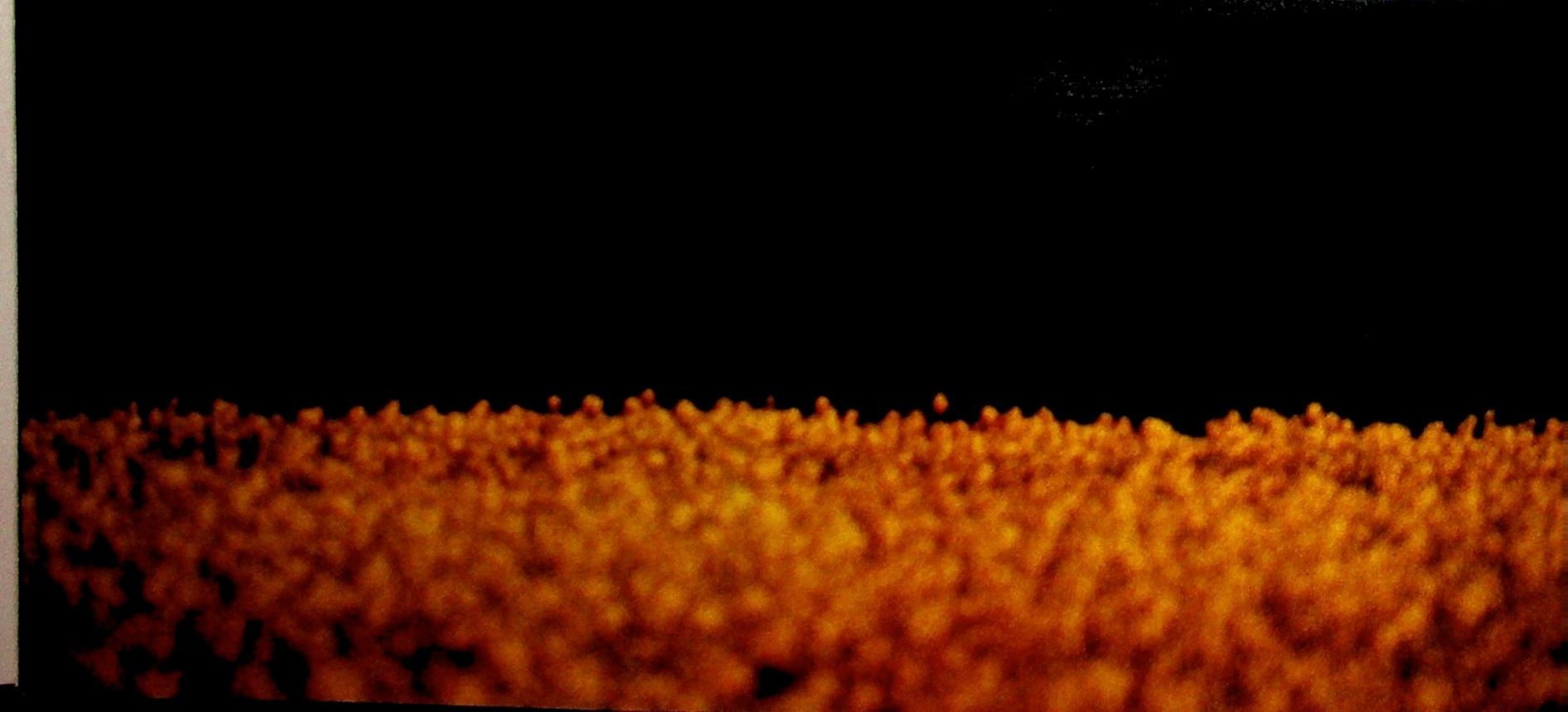
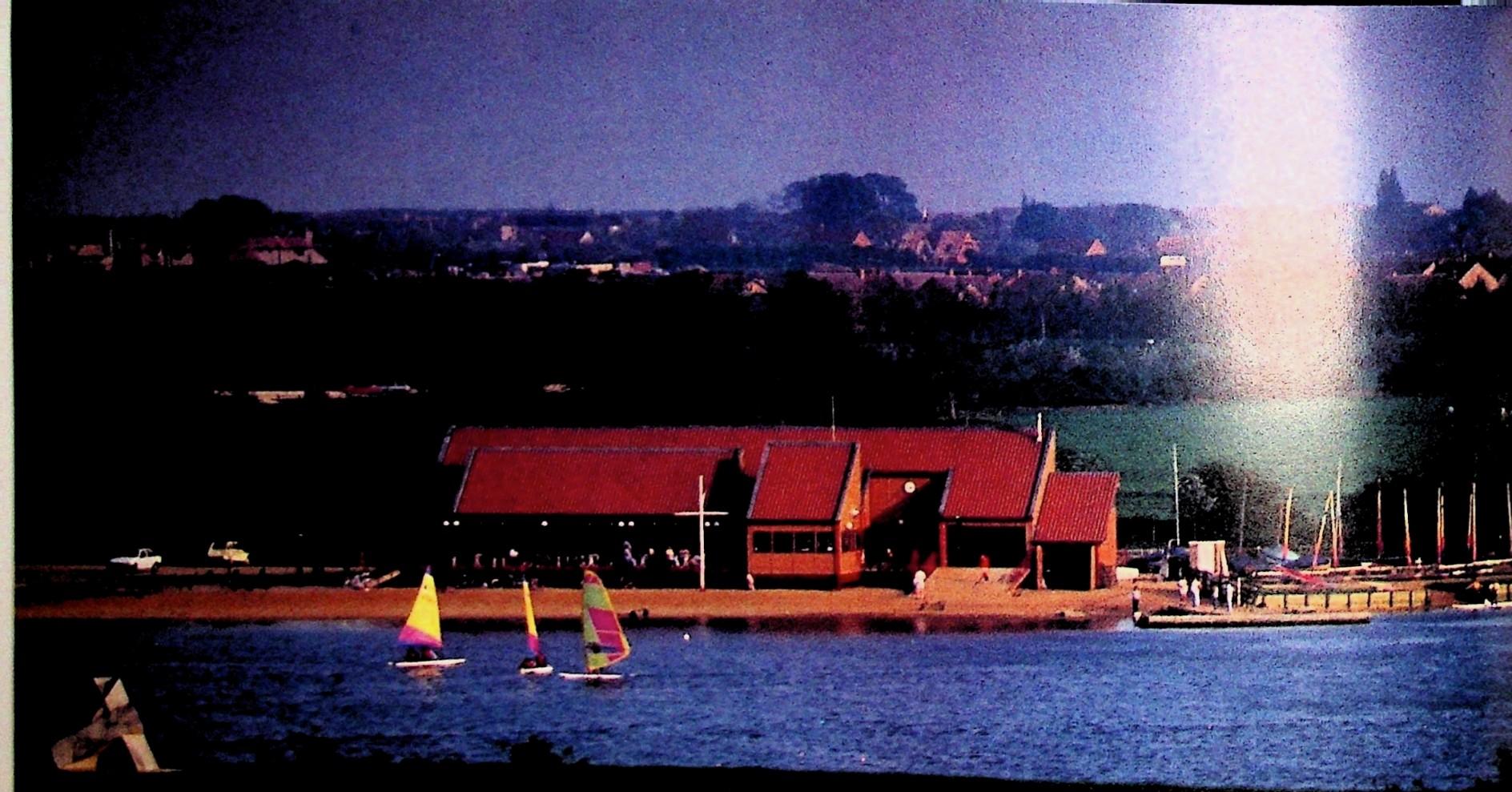
By 1988 those pressures were acting furiously on building land prices in Peterborough. Sites which cost £75,000 an acre in 1985 and £150,000 in 1987 went at auction in 1988 for between £450,000 and £700,000 an acre. Chairman Jeremy Rowe was staggered at such a rise in the value of the Botolph water meadows on which he had played as a boy. Houses on such sites were unlikely to sell for less than £100,000 and some would go to £150,000. David Bath pointed out that a new house, however small, could not be bought for much less than £50,000.

'Much of the explanation for this can be put at the door of factors outside Peterborough's control. Housing land and house price inflation is a national phenomenon accentuated in East Anglia where house prices last year rose by 40 per cent.'

'Peterborough is now regarded by many as part of the south-east. Electrification of the main line railway has provided capacity for many more commuters. Over 2,000 annual season tickets are now issued compared with 500 a few years ago. The service is comfortable, regular and fast – many trains are around fifty minutes to King's Cross.'

All these changes were pushing house purchase beyond the reach of people with modest incomes. To make matters worse Peterborough was running out of building land. In mid-1988 the corporation calculated the city's land bank at enough for 5,000 additional houses, four years supply. But as many of the sites were small and privately owned, there was no guarantee they would be developed. Jeremy Rowe saw only one solution.

'The answer is more building land. That has been provided initially by the Secretary of State's decision to permit the building of over 5,000 houses on the Fletton brickpits. No doubt more land will be needed later on.'



## 12. THE QUALITY OF LIFE

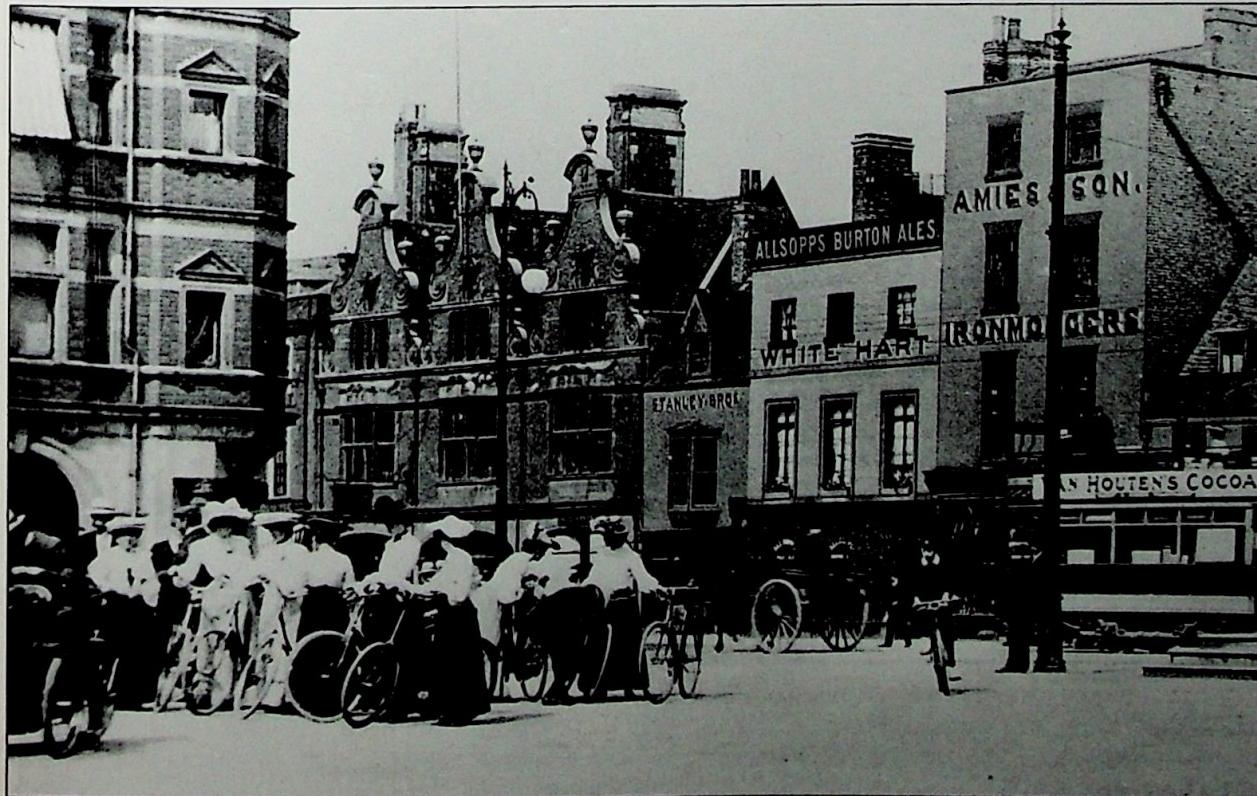
What is 'quality of life'? The concept has an encouraging sound to it but, when all is said and done, people view life very differently. The abstract sculpture which brings joy to one creates only indifference in another. Football, likewise, arouses mixed emotions. The excitement and ritual it brings to some is yobbos and litter to others.

Notwithstanding intellectual quibbles of this kind the members and staff of the corporation were steadfast in the pursuit of what they, with their varying points of view, saw as quality of life. For them the term was a symbol of their concern

to enable the residents of the new Peterborough to enjoy lives that went beyond the mundane routines of eat, work, sleep. It meant, too, trying never to settle for second-best.

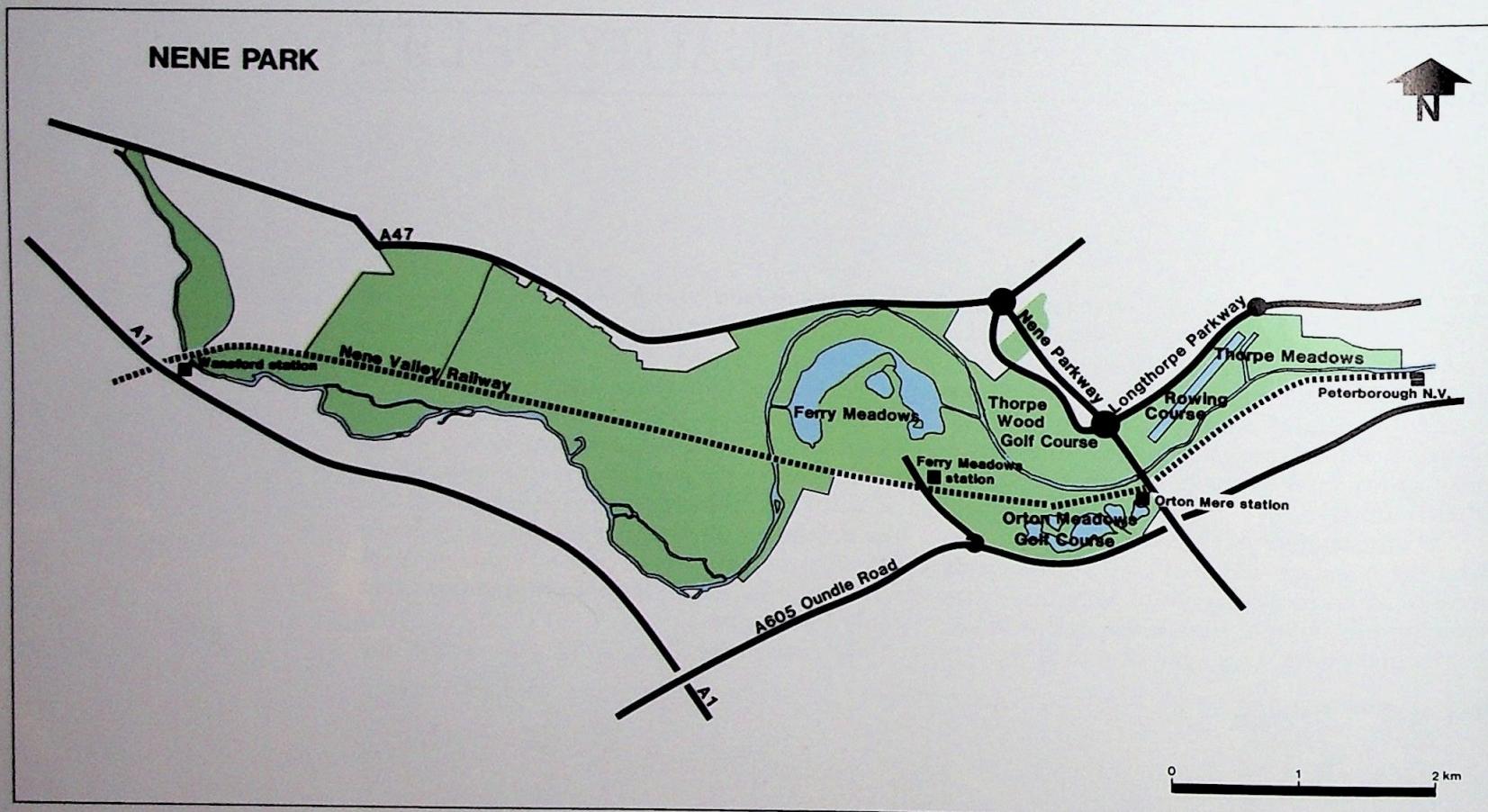
Quality of life in these terms already existed in Peterborough before the corporation was set up. It was there in the numinous gothic space of the cathedral, in the city's cycling clubs, in the Peterborough volunteer fire brigade, in the limitless skies of East Anglia and in a dozen other ways. In other words there were traditions that could be built on.

The creation of Nene Park was clearly the



OPPOSITE: *The Watersports Centre at Ferry Meadows.*

*An Edwardian bicycling party in the Market Place (now Cathedral Square).  
(Peterborough Central Library)*



*Nene Park. The city centre is at the east end of the park: Ferry Meadows is in the centre.*

corporation's main bid to give life in Peterborough a new dimension that would benefit one and all. The park was nevertheless only the most visible of a wide array of opportunities that were stitched into the townships and the city centre. Centres for sports, music and the arts; clubs for people with handicaps; a hierarchy of places for children's play; seats in the sun in Cathedral Square; skill groups for unemployed school-leavers; Peterborough's own string orchestra; sculpture in the township squares by artists of national repute; opportunities for volunteering and public service – all were nourished by the corporation because it was believed they would enrich and diversify life in Peterborough.

Jeremy Rowe, the only new town chairman to have been born in his future bailiwick, grew up in a house overlooking the Nene and discovered as a boy the delights of the valley which the corpor-

ation was later to harness for all. 'My sister was two years older than I and we had a real Swallows and Amazons upbringing. We had a clinker-built sailing dinghy and used to sail up the river preparing for pirates around the next bend. When the frost came we would go skating on the water meadows. We only had traditional fenland runners and envied my Dad his Norwegian speed skates.'

The potential of the Ferry Meadows on which the Rowe children played caught Tom Hancock's eye immediately he settled down to produce his draft plan. He was flying over the city in a helicopter. As he clattered up the Nene valley he became convinced he was flying over what promised to be one of the finest town parks in the world. It would start close to the cathedral at the Embankment, with its lawns and willow-lined walks, and extend by way of pleasure



*Archery and windsurfing at Ferry Meadows.*



Lynch Farm Riding Centre.

grounds set in a meander of the river a full eight miles to Sutton, a hamlet bedded in buttercupped meadows.

The sixties, those golden years of liberalism, cheap petrol and the Beatles were called by some 'the age of leisure'. Looking ahead Tom Hancock saw a coming transformation in the way people lived. 'Increased affluence and mobility are creating a demand for sports and activities previously restricted to a high income minority. Boating, swimming, water-skiing, inland sailing, camping, gliding, horse-riding, and other outdoor sports in a natural environment are becoming increasingly popular.'

The master plan developed this theme. In it the

corporation undertook to make the new Peterborough a 'good place' for living and 'to provide . . . generous means for the enjoyment of leisure'. It also noted that indoor sports were very poorly provided for in the city.

It so happened that the kind of park Hancock envisaged in the Nene valley had not long before been endorsed by the government. The national parks, which John Dower's wartime committee had proposed, had by then been successfully launched. But they were intended to be havens of wild nature and anyway most of the big cities were remote from them. In 1966, in a White Paper on *Leisure in the Countryside* (Cmnd. 2928), the government argued that the mobile, active families of the 'leisure society' needed somewhere to go nearer to home. 'Country

OPPOSITE: Canada geese at Ferry Meadows with, in the distance, a sculpture by John Maine - 'Pyramid'.

parks' were how this need might be met. Funding was made available for them through the Countryside Commission.

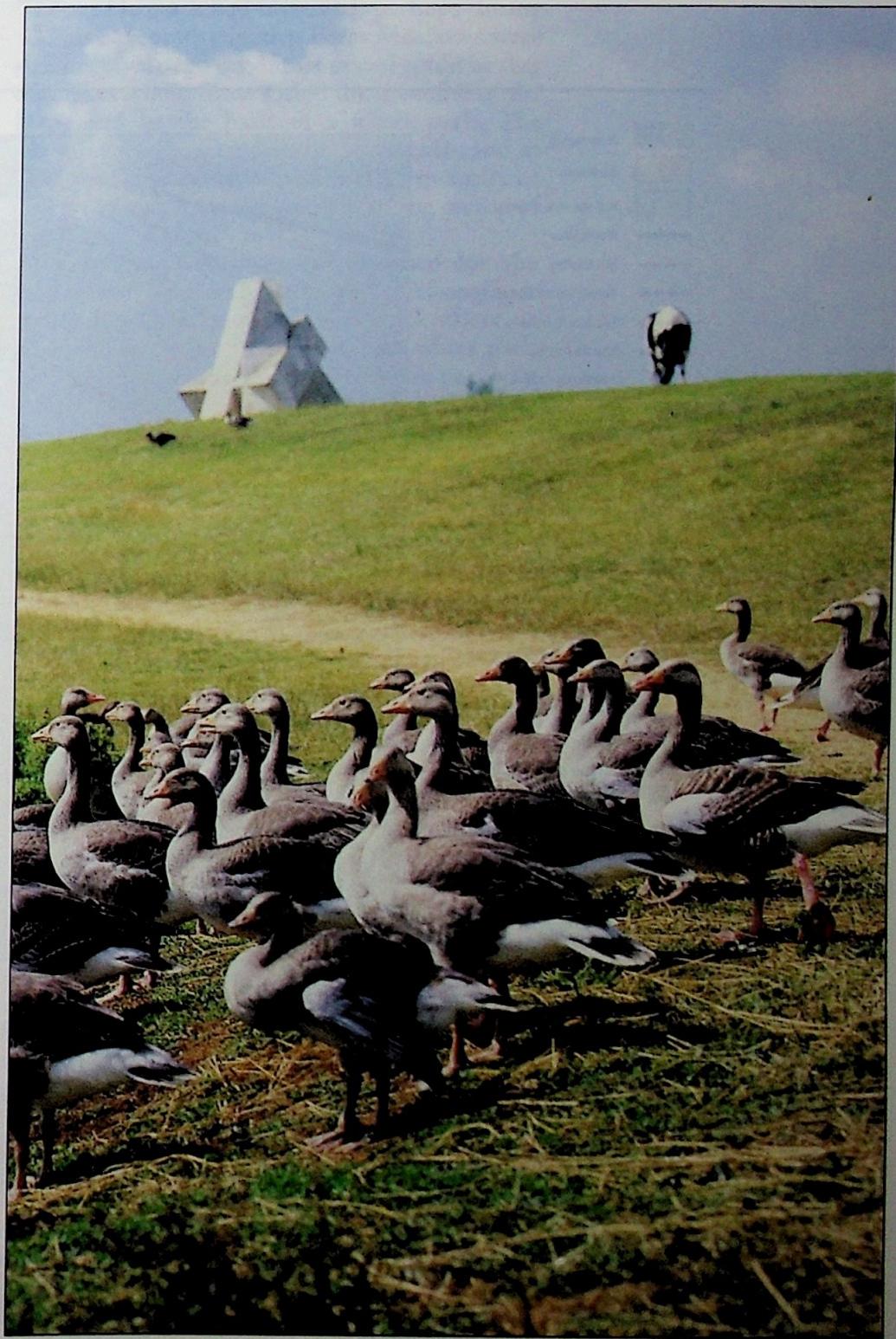
Nene Park and Ferry Meadows promised to make a classic country park. There was room for boating lakes, cycleways, a riding centre, golf courses, a rowing club, places for angling and two railways – one of miniature and one of continental gauge. Yet there was also scope for quiet walks and peaceful retreats for those seeking open country. And all this was on the doorstep of a city surrounded by countryside subject to intensive farming.

Ferry Meadows were first opened to the public in the summer of 1978. In the first two months visitors numbered 65,000. Ten years later Nene Park was in the top ten country parks in England – on a par with Clumber near Nottingham and the Lea Valley to the east of London. Visitors averaged 800,000 a year.

Vigorous debate preceded decisions about how to arrange Ferry Meadows. Loughborough Recreation Planning Consultants were called in and worked with Robin Guthrie, social development officer and David Bath, at that time deputy planning officer. David Bath recalled: 'By and large we rejected their conclusions. One thing they urged was a holiday village with chalets for tourists. They saw it generating revenue. We have permitted a small caravan site run by the Caravan Club of Great Britain but what they proposed was more radical and large-scale. We rejected that because we thought it would detract from the atmosphere we wished to create.'

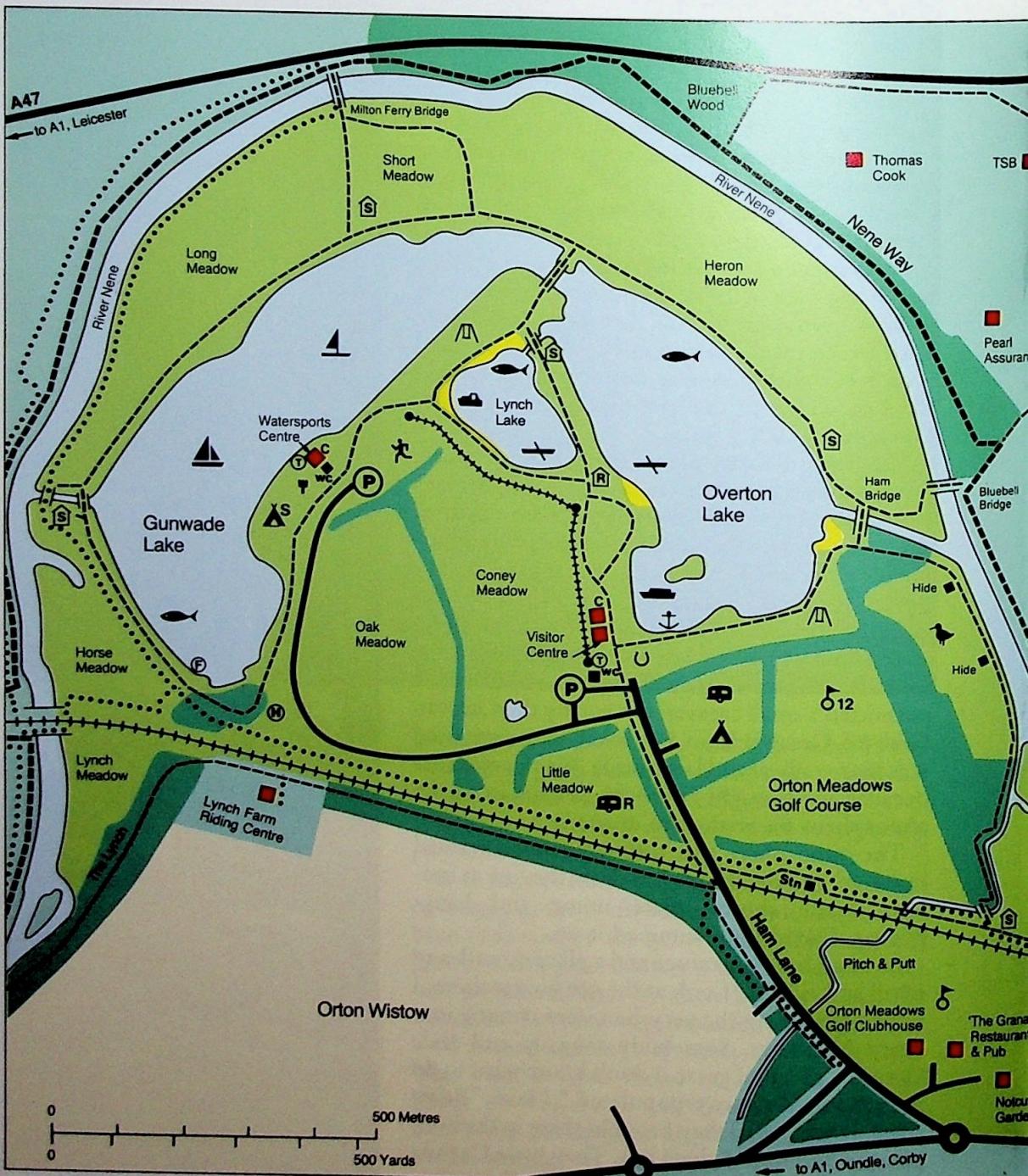
The atmosphere that the corporation wanted involved lots of activity but drew the line at fun-fairs, trade shows, water-skiing and hang-gliding. David Bath summed it up.

'...its a haven, a refuge and a place to walk and stroll and ride... Look at the geese over there. I remember seeing the very first ones coming into Ferry Meadows. Somebody rang up and said: "I've got a load of geese. I don't know what to do with them. We're overpopulated." I said: "Bring them down." And they brought them in the back of a van and tipped them out. They were Canada geese and now we've got a huge population.'



# FERRY MEADOWS

- Woodland
- Beaches
- Residential areas
- Nene Way
- Footpaths
- Nene Valley Steam Railway
- Miniature railway
- Horse routes
- H Horse box park
- C Pony, pony trap rides
- P Car parks
- R Caravan club site
- R Caravan rally & special events site
- A Camping site
- A Camping (special groups)
- + Children's play area
- + Cruiser mooring
- + 'Nene Star' river cruises
- S Sailing
- B Boat hire
- B Board sailing
- C Model boats, inflatables
- C Model boat clubs
- F Fishing
- F Fishing stands for disabled
- T Trimtrack
- G Golf
- B Barbecue area
- B Bird reserve
- S Shelter
- R Refreshment kiosk
- C Café
- WC Public toilets
- T Public telephone





Tom Hancock had observed, perhaps during his helicopter trip, that Ferry Meadows were rich in gravel deposits. If that gravel could be dug out, lakes would form within the meander of the Nene and be the basis of a water park. The question was how to dispose of quickly, and at minimum cost to the taxpayer, a vast quantity of gravel and all the rich alluvial soil sitting on top of it.

A neat, circular deal was designed for the corporation by Ken Hutton, the chief engineer and Neville Smallman, the chief legal officer. It promised to create the lakes for the water park and embankments for the future Nene parkway in a single interlocking operation. If the Department of Transport could be persuaded to support it, then the owners of the meadows, a gravel company and the contractors due to build the parkway might all be expected to dance to a tune played by the partnership.

Hutton started things going by getting the Department to agree to Ferry Meadows being the source of materials for the earth embankments. The six owners of the meadows were then offered a nominal price for their land. They had little choice but to accept it. Had there been no new town the county planning committee would never have allowed the digging of the gravel. The site was outside the town and dredging it would have spoilt a picturesque valley.

The new town changed that and made it possible for the gravel owners to realise their 'royalty' assets. The county would give permission for the gravel to be dug provided the owners undertook to sell their land to the corporation. Another set of agreements drawn up by Neville Smallman required Amey's, the gravel contractors, to complete the job in three years. The planning permission also obliged them to shape the diggings so that, when finished, they were precisely the sailing lakes wanted by the corporation's landscape architects.

There was a hiccup when Monk's, the road contractors, said they did not want the earth on top of the gravel; they had lined up something cheaper at one of the brickpits. Monk's were then advised that the earth on the brickfield would be

*Ferry Meadows – the heart of Nene Park.*

needed to restore the land after the clay had been dug and that planning permission to remove it was unlikely to be granted. Ken Hutton got his tote double.

'Monks put a Bailey bridge over the river, removed all the overburden and used it for the Nene parkway embankments. I think they probably moved about 1.5 million cubic metres. Amey's were left with the gravel which they began immediately to sell all over the city.' It was a coup. The corporation had created the major part of a five hundred acre park at virtually no cost. The secret was Neville Smallman's circle of interlocking agreements.

Years later another deal led to the creation of Nene Park's thousand metre rowing-course and clubhouse. They were brought into existence by Ken Hutton's elegant bridge on the Frank Perkins parkway. The approaches to the bridge not only filled up part of the valley at a point where the Nene often floods but also went straight through the city's rowing club.

The Anglian Water Authority said the lost storage for flood water must be replaced by a balancing lake. Hutton and his engineers got to work. 'We made a virtue of the necessities. We relocated the clubhouse and built beside it a rowing-course as an overflow for the flood water.'

**T**he Nene Valley railway is another unique aspect of the park. The line was built by the London and Birmingham to link Peterborough and Northampton. Dr Beeching amputated most of it and in 1974, when traffic on the remaining stretch consisted of little more than trains carrying the boys' tuck boxes to and from Oundle school, the rest was closed.

The corporation initially aimed to make the line part of a national railway museum. It would have been useful publicity for the town and, according to David Bath, a cut above the one at York. 'Our idea, and I think it is a smashing one, was to link the museum to a steam railway running through the park. People could have not only looked at the exhibits but gone for rides as well.'

When the government decided to support York's bid for a less imaginative museum, the corporation bought the Nene Valley line from British Rail and leased it to the Peterborough Railway Society. The society then set about adapting it to the Berne or European loading gauge (continental trains are higher and wider than British ones) and collecting continental rolling-stock. One of the benefits this has brought was described by David Bath.

'This is the only railway in the country with continental trains, so if you are making a film about the last war and escaping prisoners, it's much cheaper to do it in Peterborough than to go to France. They therefore make more money out of films than passengers.'

Bath added that even though the railway is a large undertaking carrying 60,000 passengers a year, volunteers were its mainstays. 'They are amazing people – absolutely crazy. I never cease to wonder at their dedication and enthusiasm. They turn up week after week in their overalls and get themselves filthy dirty just for the pleasure of driving a steam train.' Marrying commercial efficiency and voluntarism may not be easy but the Nene Valley is wonderful for people who want to hear the hiss of genuine European steam.

Phil Doran, the corporation's social development officer, observed that voluntary work was equally well established in the townships. The corporation had always supported volunteering warmly believing it to be one of the glues that enable disparate people to achieve community. Councils for voluntary service, the arts, sports and community relations were therefore all helped to develop alongside bodies like the Lady Lodge Arts Centre and Age Concern.

Within the new town partnership the promotion of improvements to the quality of life was the responsibility of a joint members' committee. The general manager's meeting prepared reports for members and in September 1978 it considered a progress report by Maurice Bradley on the city's recreation opportunities.

There was a lot to say. The establishment of meeting places and community centres early in

the life of new neighbourhoods was, by that time, well established and the lesson of Bretton's 'thirsty years' had been digested. The 'Shire Horse', the first Orton Malborne pub to start dispensing frothing pints, was in business before the local population had exceeded 1,600. Opportunities to work off beer bellies were also multiplying as the schools-for-all being created by the partnership were providing gyms and playing-fields for adults as well as children.

Children's play and the vegetable-growing proclivities of their parents were developing too. A committee under Sir Ivor Baker, board member and chairman of Baker Perkins, steered the work on children's play. Sir Ivor's photograph stares sternly (as even benign chairmen are inclined to do) from a report published in 1974 by the Greater Peterborough Children's Play Council.

Donne Buck, a New Zealander and the corpor-

*Thomas getting up energy to puff along the Nene Valley line.*





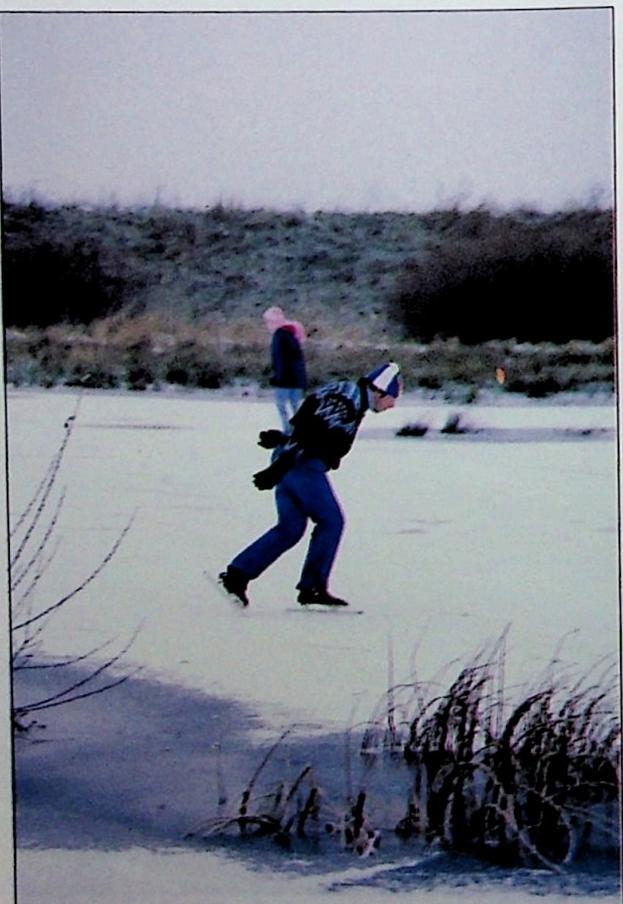
*Doorstep play.*

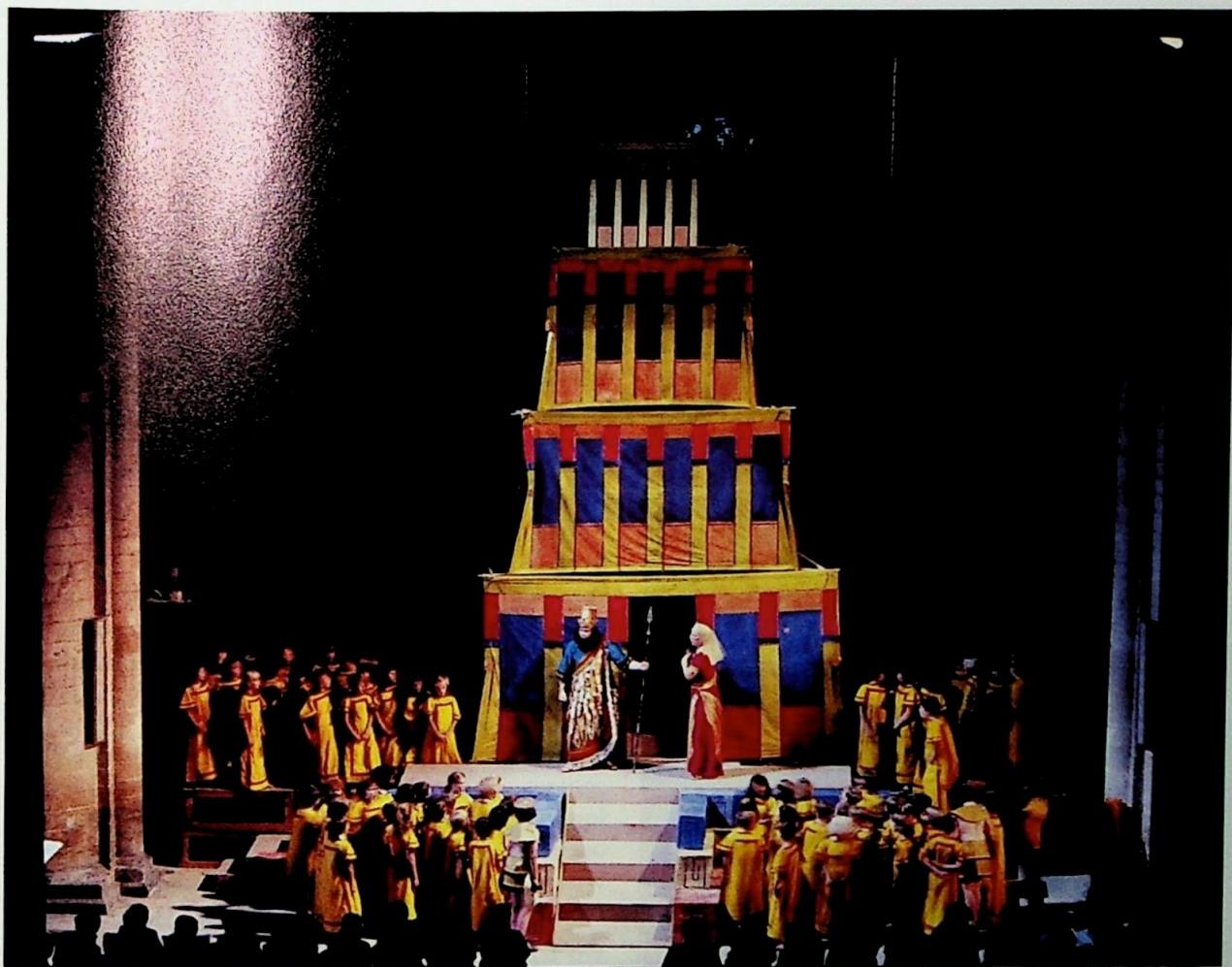
ation's play officer, was the author of the report. He persuaded the corporation to reject old-fashioned playgrounds equipped with 'Kettering' chain swings and iron slides and to go instead for a range of play facilities covering all ages from toddlers to teenagers. The youngest children were provided with 'doorstep play areas' located within every group of twenty to thirty houses. Mounds and logs formed the basis of many of them. Manufactured equipment was tried but it proved to be unsatisfactory. At the teenage end of the range there were adventure playgrounds. As for the growers of onions and giant squash, they were digging away at a growing number of good old-fashioned allotments.

In Bretton the Cresset had opened its doors and suffered one overwhelming problem. Young people from all over the town had flocked to it. Work was put in train to lessen the effects of overcrowding. The progress report went on to discuss progress with arts, crafts, music, drama, and libraries. 'The last two years have seen a dramatic increase in the facilities available in the townships,' Bradley noted.

*RIGHT: A fen tiger?*

There was progress to report in the provision of city-wide facilities too. The city council's covered pool on the Embankment had received its first swimmers during the previous year (1977) and Lady Lodge Arts Centre was about to open. In the city centre a new night club, a wine bar and a pizza place had all recently started up although there was still a dearth of good places for the eighteen to twenty-five age group. The recently-opened Key Theatre was flourishing, though its 399 seats meant it could hardly survive without subsidy. Perhaps most important of all, newcomers to Peterborough had at their disposal all the pubs, clubs and cafes of a long-established town. A pioneering spirit may have been needed out in the raw townships but all the features of a traditional town centre, not to mention a Norman cathedral, were present at the end of a short bus-ride.





*On stage at the Key Theatre.*

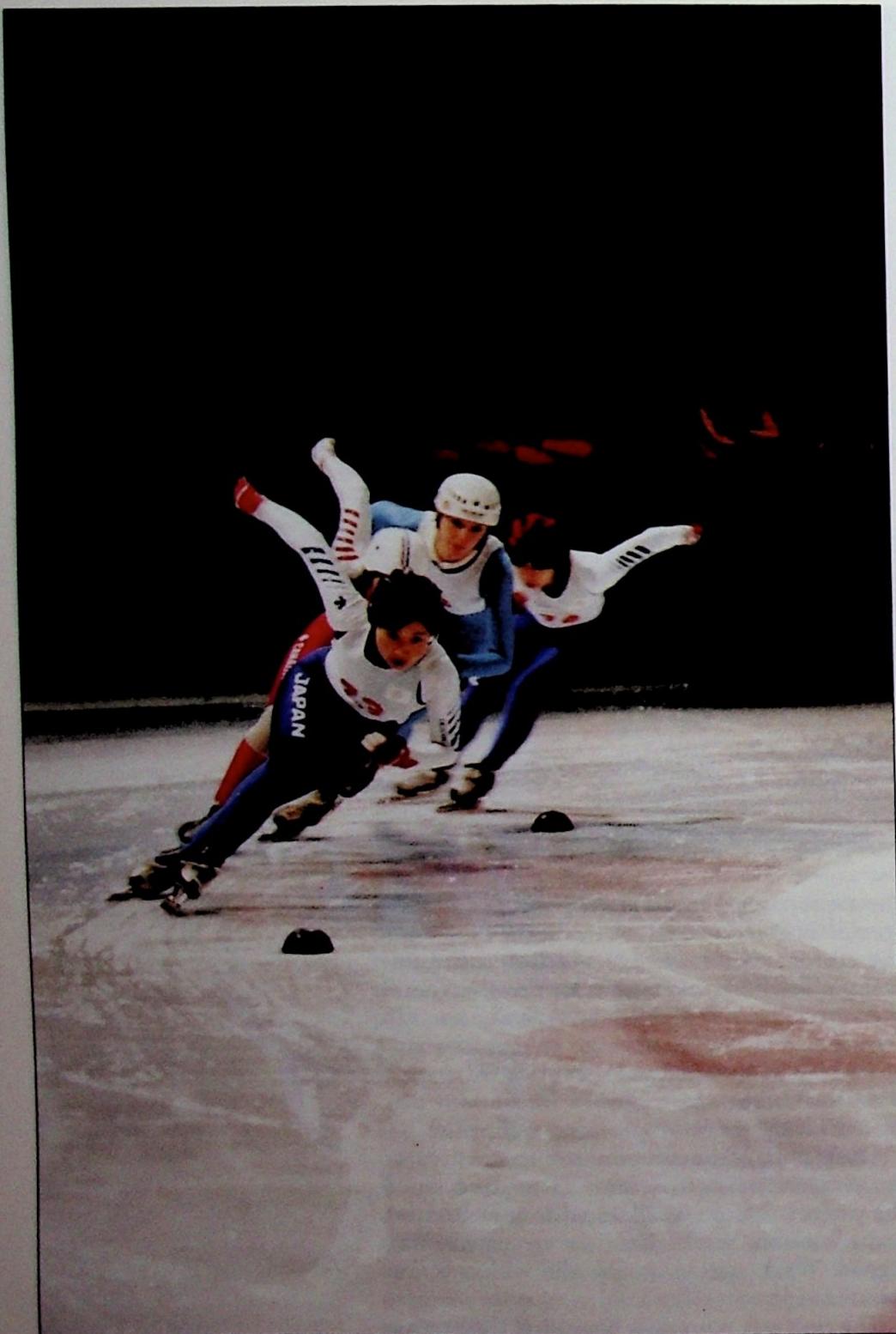
Like most places of its size Peterborough has its football club, but its sporting *traditions* are not as in other cities. The nearby fens saw to that. Their flatness gave rise to cycle racing. Their flatness in winter encouraged the sport of speed skating. Jeremy Rowe's grandfather collected boxfuls of medals in both sports. In the 1880s he won the Peterborough Bicycling Club's ten mile championship year after year and in 1891 picked up the fifty mile medal. (His time was three hours and four minutes.) The year before he had slipped out of the saddle and into his speed skates to come third in the international amateur championships at Lingy Fen. He was, as they said in those days, a real 'fen tiger'.

Given these traditions it is not surprising that

the corporation jumped at the chance of a major ice rink in Peterborough. It was at the time when the exploits of John Curry and Robin Cousins had got Britain on skates but ice rinks were still commercially risky. Dennis Adams, an Ely businessman, saw a way of making the risk acceptable to investors and spent two frustrating years in Cambridge trying to find a site that would satisfy the town planning authorities.

David Parr, of the corporation's estates department, then had a visit from him. They talked about the project. Space was allocated to it at Bretton and about six weeks later an agreement was signed. Work started on the site within a few months.

The rink was put into a huge steel shed on an



industrial estate. Funding was on the basis that should skating become unfashionable again, the building could be turned into a factory. David Bath explained why this was acceptable to the corporation.

'If you'd put the rink in a city centre you couldn't fund it on the basis of it becoming a factory. You had to put it on an industrial estate. And for a lot of local authorities that meant using land required for manufacturing jobs.' This did not worry the corporation which had plenty of industrial land. There was also a very good site for the ice rink at Bretton. 'It's on a bus route, it's got cycleways and footpaths, it's next to a township so it's very accessible and, by the way, it creates a lot of jobs.'

The upshot was the huge East of England Ice Rink. In 1984 the world short distance championships were held there and skaters clocked up speeds of thirty miles an hour on the 110 metre track. The rink was also the training base of Jayne Torville and Christopher Dean, world ice dance champions.

Dennis Adams went on to create other sports centres set in industrial estates. David Bath was involved in decisions on all of them. 'His second one is an indoor tennis and badminton centre with a restaurant and bar and alongside it a hotel. It was funded on the same basis. If the whole thing folds up you take out the insides and you've got a factory and an office.' Not content with that he built a gymnasium and snooker hall.

Other firms subsequently promoted a roller skating rink, an eleven-screen cinema, a snooker hall, a restaurant and a nightclub, all on an industrial estate on the east side of the city. On the south side an existing factory was adapted for Australian indoor cricket. 'You've got no problems with car parking. You've got no congestion. It's an ideal solution,' David Bath commented.

Peterborough bicyclists may have to go to Leicester to find a velodrome but, as with skating so with cycling, the corporation has done

*Speed skaters at the East of England Ice Rink.*

its best to keep up the city's tradition. Seventy-two miles of cycleways are the result although it has to be admitted the city's two racing clubs ride the roads.

Not many orchestras can have been formed as a result of a determined young cellist hearing an advertisement on a London radio station, yet this was the origin of the Peterborough String Orchestra. Joanna Borrett heard a corporation commercial aimed at companies and left a message on the answering machine at Touthill Close. Phil Doran found it one morning on his desk. 'It said "Would we support an orchestra?"'

The answer, after some deliberation, was 'Yes' and Borrett went on to form a twelve-piece string ensemble. The orchestra acquired an enviable reputation and gained the support of the Arts Council. In 1987 the council agreed financial support for the ensemble at which point it was expanded and renamed the Anglian Chamber Orchestra. Igor Oistrakh, the distinguished Russian violinist, became its patron.

Joanna Borrett left her creation in 1986 to go on to other things. Phil Doran knew her well since his office acted as secretary to the orchestra. 'Joanna was the mainspring of the idea. She had the strength to get it off the ground. The corporation took on the role of patron.'

**S**culture was another fine art to attract the corporation's patronage. As at Harlow, Milton Keynes and several other new towns, it was decided to put startling modern works of art under the very noses of the residents. Rodin's craggy statue of Balzac in the *Boulevard Raspail* seems to have seeded this idea. Before that public sculpture tended to be commemorative of kings, emperors and generals. But with Balzac, Clemenceau started something different. It was a risky thing to do. Remember the brouhaha that surrounded the exhibition of Carl André's pile of bricks at the Tate Gallery.

The board nevertheless decided to take the risk and from 1978 onwards a committee, chaired first

*The City Cycle Race, 1985.*





*Joanna Borrett's string ensemble at Burghley House, the seat of the Cecil family since the early sixteenth century. Burghley is within the District of Peterborough.*

by Jimmy James and then by Gordon Cameron, began assembling a collection of works by living British sculptors. Keith Maplestone was the committee's artistic advisor.

According to Lesley Green of the Public Art Development Trust, the Peterborough sculptures have no equal in Britain. This is because they are in a town in the midst of the hurly-burly of daily life rather than in a 'sculpture zoo' and range from the work of Sir Anthony Caro to Barry Flanagan. 'The variety of the works in Peterborough is fantastic. The corporation has been open to a younger generation of artists. That makes the collection.'

The board did not always find it easy to spend the taxpayer's money on art for art's sake but

Gordon Cameron heard tell of the lion-heartedness of Jimmy James, his predecessor. 'He made brave choices. When people were humming and hawing Jimmy would drive on and say "Right, what we need is a big sculpture collection".

'Jimmy was passionate about the new town but he was also a doer. He would say, "Damn the five thousand pounds. Good sculptures, that's what we want." He was apparently very brave.' He was also ahead of his time in Britain. North German towns like Kassel with its arts festivals (and more recently Glasgow with the Burrell collection) perceived that developing a town culturally was to develop it economically. Peterborough's sculptures may be beautiful, loved or detested, but they are also a part of marketing.

## 13. TRANSFORMING THE CITY CENTRE

'Getting beds for the children gave us a bit of trouble. We had to order them from two different stores because you couldn't get three in one store.'

Eileen Mulhern's memories of shopping in Peterborough in 1971 tell of the modesty of the town. Michael Mulhern thought the place reminded him of Sligo although, if anything, it was a bit smaller. The result was that Eileen, like everyone else, regularly went elsewhere to shop. 'You had to go out of Peterborough, especially for things like clothes for the children. You didn't get much choice otherwise. We used to go a couple of times a year to Brent Cross or to Leicester or Nottingham.'

'Adams', 'Chelsea Girl', 'Dixons', 'Next', 'Saxone', 'Virgin', 'Zales'. The standardised A to Z of modern multiple retailing with its flash signs, emphasis on style and efficient cost-accounting had yet to descend on Peterborough. The city was still dominated by the shopkeeping of an earlier generation. Richard Hillier, the city's local studies librarian, grew up in it.

'A lot of the shops were still owned by families who had been here for generations and knew every second or third person in the town – or at least they claimed to. There was Sterne's the chemists, who were run by Fowlers, Johnson's the butchers, Petts the ironmongers, Hodgson's the drapers.' It seems too as if trade was insufficient to sustain a department store. 'There had been a Robert Sayles. It was a three- or four-storey building but it was literally burnt to the ground in 1956. It was the biggest fire Peterborough's ever known, and it is quite telling that Sayles didn't bother to rebuild it.'

Perkins, the diesel engineers, whose main workshop was nearby, nearly went up in flames too. The fire brigade poured water on to it to save

the building and the hundreds of engines within. Who knows, if the fire had burnt Perkins out as well as Sayles, Peterborough might have lost its major engineering firm as well as its only department store.

The cosy coterie of the old established Bridge Street traders was to be profoundly changed by the new town and the new customers it was to bring. Tom Hancock's draft plan was unequivocal about that. 'The existing city centre will be renewed as the regional shopping and service centre with expansion westwards along the north bank of the river. Sites for civic, educational and special commercial buildings will be adjacent to the park and available early in the expansion programme. There will be a new transport interchange.'

Suburban office blocks set in broad acres of car

*Bridge Street in the early seventies.*



parks had no place in Hancock's plan. Nevertheless he knew he could not cram into the existing city centre all the offices, and their attendant cars, made necessary by the new town. Henry Wells had tried it and been forced into double-decking. Richard Hillier thought the result disastrous. 'You poked your eye down at the cathedral which was left in a little green well.'

Hancock went instead for the idea of a boulevard of offices stretching out along Thorpe Road and backing on to a marina by the river. Wyndham Thomas was utterly opposed to it. 'It wouldn't have been an extension. It would have been a duplication. You would have had two centres, a new commercial centre with the great bulk of shopping there and the old city centre where it had always been.'

For Ed Schoon, who replaced Hancock after the palace revolution of 1969, the office boulevard proposal would have made sense only if Thorpe Road had not existed and it had been necessary to build it. As it was: 'It would have been crazy to ruin one of the nicest roads in Peterborough and replace it with a row of office blocks when it was preferable for the office workers to be much nearer the shops.' This view, coupled with the unacceptably high cost of duplicating the Crescent bridge over the railway, led to a decision to create an office quarter in Northminster, just next to the cathedral. In Schoon's view this was undoubtedly the right decision.

Elsewhere in the city centre Hancock proposed to keep picturesque Priestgate and historic Cathedral Square intact while building a new shopping centre across Queen Street where Perkins had only just stopped hammering out diesel engines. 'New Street', which he foresaw aligned on the cathedral and running through the shopping centre, was a cross between central Milton Keynes and the *Rue de Rivoli* – high glazed walls and noble arcades.

The corporation's master plan spelt out the scale of the changes that the new town would impose on the city centre. 'It must be equipped to serve twice as many people, some of them living

perhaps twice as far away, and to serve them more often, more fully and in many more ways than it does today.' This meant space for up to three times as much retailing and nearly twice as many office and shop workers.

Turning to parking the plan foresaw 'three to four times as many cars parked in multi-storey buildings that will take up almost as much land as all the new shops, offices, entertainments and cultural provisions put together.'

Ed Schoon, who had just seen his draft plan for Ipswich new town aborted by the Cabinet, was glad to throw himself into giving birth to Peterborough's new centre. 'Wyndham asked me virtually as soon as I got to Peterborough to chair the city centre study group. I think it was one of the most enjoyable periods of my professional career.' The group, which began work in December 1969, was composed of representatives of all three partners although the county council had no financial involvement in the redevelopment of the city centre.

Schoon found little to encourage him in his initial encounter with the group. 'You could have cut the air. One of the very first comments was made, I think, by somebody from the county council. He said: "What's he doing here from the city council?"'

'There was a great deal of animosity between the two local authorities at the time. Whether it was because of political complexion I don't know. But we were allegedly a partnership authority and if the partners could not work together it was a poor do. I took it as part of my job to get all three working together so we tried to get rid of all these petty jealousies. It took about three months and was helped by new blood coming in.'

The authors of the city centre plan did not mince their words in their analysis of the shortcomings of what they found. They identified its 'unbalanced, disjointed and attenuated shopping centre, with a preponderance of secondary units strung out along a main traffic artery; its disproportionately low level of employment in services, especially in offices; its poor public transport facilities; the low intensity of its overall



## CITY CENTRE PLAN

SHOPS	RESIDENTIAL	MIXED USES	MIXED COMMERCIAL
OFFICES	CAR PARKS	OPEN SPACE	PROPOSED PRIMARY ROADS
PUBLIC BUILDINGS	PUBLIC UTILITIES	PEDESTRIAN PRIORITY	ROADS OTHER MAIN ROADS

Plan for the city centre prepared by the partnership authorities and confirmed by the Secretary of State in 1971.

development; the visual mediocrity of its approaches, particularly from the south; its constriction by the unfortunate siting of the power station and the ugly, obsolescent industrial buildings that still occupy key sites in its central core.'

The centre of Peterborough was clearly a mess and a muddle. How was it to be sorted out? Donald MacDonald played a leading role in finding the answer. The key to it was the judicious creation of a new shopping centre. It promised to be 'a potentially golden commercial opportunity' and to pull together the disjointed parts of the city centre, provide space for large stores and put the bus station where it would be convenient for travellers.

Creating the huge shopping centre threw up conflicts between commercial and city planning aims. Yet it alone was capable of achieving the master plan aim of upgrading the city. Somehow the conflicts were resolved. As Donald MacDonald observed: 'It has been successful commercially and it has achieved beyond our hopes the uplifting and joining of the whole central shopping area.'

Keith Maplestone, the corporation's chief architect, was as much as anyone responsible for this achievement. He was the designer of the centre. Ken Hutton, as chief engineer, provided a consultancy service in his field of expertise and Donald MacDonald, then assistant finance officer, acted as project leader. Len Jarrad and Hadley Buck of Hillier Parker, the corporation's property consultants, were also key members of the team.

Maplestone was working on the Grosvenor shopping centre at Chester (and had read Ebenezer Howard) when he applied to work for the corporation. 'I was enthusiastic about the garden city idea. What I wanted to do was to get on and build houses.' His interviewers had other ideas. They kept asking questions about shopping centres. Maplestone discovered why. 'I soon realised that the reason why I got the job was Queensgate.'

The Queensgate saga ran for ten years starting in 1972–1973 with preliminary designs and talks

with stores and ending with a royal opening. In between there were two public inquiries – into the compulsory purchase of property and the proposed demolition of listed buildings – and filing cabinets of financial and legal negotiations. Many other events happened concurrently. Two concerned the appearance of the city centre. Gordon Cullen was brought in to give advice on how to improve the city's looks in the longer term. Groups of traders were persuaded to give their buildings face-lifts to keep up appearances in the short term.

Gordon Cullen, wit, draughtsman extraordinary and high priest of the art of 'townscape', had the job of doing something about those main streets which were said 'to peter out into formless twilight areas'.

Asked to define 'townscape', Cullen wrote, 'I would say that one building is architecture but two buildings are townscape. For as soon as two buildings are juxtaposed the art of townscape is released.'<sup>8</sup> An important part of Cullen's seductive philosophy was that people see towns in two ways, as an existing view and an emerging view – a here and a there. Where the two are allowed to merge, all is dull. Where one gives no warning of the next, or, better still, gives just a hint, *there* is urban drama.

After surveying Peterborough and noting with approval how the archway leading from Cathedral Square into Gallery Court provides a 'dramatic revelation' of the west front of the cathedral – an operatically powerful 'here and there' – Cullen got down to proposing two new squares and a tree-lined mall leading northwards out of the city centre.

He then considered how Cathedral Square should be treated when the day came for it to be emptied of cars and turned into a place for people. As always this man who viewed streets with the eye of a stage designer, was bent on drama and contrast. His suggestions were to treat Cathedral Square and Cowgate as a 'stone axis' and Long Causeway/Bridge Street as a 'green axis'. Where the buildings were exceptional, let them dominate; where they were a modest backdrop, let the space be filled out by trees.



The opportunity to introduce Cullen's ideas was to come after Queensgate was completed and the main streets could be closed to traffic. Meanwhile uncertainty about the future of the city centre was leading to tattiness. The corporation therefore promoted giant outdoor paint-ins. The Civic Trust had pioneered this idea at Magdalen Street in Norwich in 1957 and had followed that experiment with others in Burslem and Windsor.

A City Centre Improvement Committee was accordingly promoted by the corporation and

Martin Jeffreys, lawyer, former city councillor and vociferous opponent of the new town, agreed to be its chairman. Effort was concentrated at first on the main shopping streets; consultant designers were engaged; the *Peterborough Standard* published a broadsheet full of prettily tinted façades; and in less than eighteen months three face-lifts were successfully completed.

The city centre plan did not specify whether the new shopping centre was to be a covered mall or, as Hancock had envisaged, an open pedestrian thoroughfare. Covered centres were by then the

*Cullen's moonlit view of the old market place transformed into a precinct.*

THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT





rule in the United States and Brent Cross was already trading in north London but, unlike Maplestone, several of the chief officers were unfamiliar with these developments. A group of them therefore went to Paris to see *Parly 2* and to the United States where they slogged around seventy-two malls.

Ed Schoon was particularly impressed by the Rouse Corporation's covered centre at Columbia new town. 'I came back totally convinced that this was the right thing. Before going I had been a doubting Thomas and Wyndham never ceases to rag me over that. He says I should have known about it before and not after him.'

Maplestone did not need this kind of convincing and the greatest influence on him was the Hoog Catharijne centre at Utrecht. There he saw for the first time, and fell in love with, the honey-coloured Jura marble on which Queensgate shoppers walk. But he still found plenty to do in the United States.

'I remember sitting beside a pool in Los Angeles with John Case (the chief estates surveyor) and having what Mrs Thatcher might call a think tank. We wrote down the twenty-seven functional points that we thought ought to be in Queensgate.' One was the importance of daylight. Maplestone's aim was to achieve the effect of an Aladdin's cave.

The think tank also decided to do away with fixed stairs. Maplestone was convinced that escalators would be sufficient. 'Fixed stairs are notoriously difficult to clean and we knew all the stores would have them.' The spacious feel of Queensgate is partly the result of that conviction.

But Maplestone did not achieve all his desires. 'I wanted one of those food courts so that people could sit out and eat, but Hadley Buck (from Hillier Parker, the corporation's property advisors) said "No, we'll never let that in Peterborough". We were ahead of our time. They are coming in everywhere now.'

**F**inancing and building a major city centre shopping mall is a herculean task and one with many pitfalls along the way. Peterborough at least had the advantage of being able to

Gordon Cullen's original crayon drawing of Long Causeway – the northern part of the 'green axis'.



*Work begins on Queensgate: corporation chairman Christopher Higgins with Sir Maurice Laing, chairman of the contractors.*

monitor what was happening at Milton Keynes where the development corporation was further ahead with building a series of huge glazed halls in the middle of nowhere. Wyndham Thomas was an admirer of Fred Lloyd Roche, his ambitious opposite number at MK, and the two often swapped experiences.

There were however profound differences in the objectives of the two towns. At Milton Keynes Fred Roche and his architect Derek Walker were intent on building nothing less than the symbolic heart of 'the city of the twenty-first century' in the midst of rolling green fields. At Peterborough, Wyndham Thomas and Keith Maplestone were trying to shoehorn a huge new complex into a cradle of financial interests and the ancient setting of a cathedral city. It was a huge challenge. Wyndham Thomas was involved in the ups and downs.

'We were desperately keen to get on with it. We'd been out to contractors to get preliminary bids and John Laing had put in the best price. This was subject to renegotiation on details but

we agreed broad figures and decided we were going to let the contract to them.'

'Then we had to get a department store and the other major space users. That took a fair time and we failed a second time to get John Lewis. Then, on the third time, I got them. They wanted to expand at Cambridge (where they traded as Robert Sayles, whose Peterborough store they had been reluctant to rebuild after the fire of 1956) but Cambridge planning was in such a mess that they could see they never would.'

'Then and only then did we get them. But even at that time the advice of most of their executives was: "The catchment area isn't big enough. It will grow too slowly." They put it all on to Peter Lewis, the chairman.'

Getting John Lewis was a coup and, as with the East of England Ice Rink, Peterborough's gain was Cambridge's loss. John Lewis, with their 'partnership' staff policy and their 'never knowingly undersold' sales policy, had exactly the image of quality and straight dealing the corporation wanted. Debenhams, the second choice, wanted a smaller store and had an image of evanescent glamour rather than solid durability. Wyndham Thomas was overwhelmed by the John Lewis decision.

'It was one of the great triumphs. When Peter Lewis told me they were coming I said, "All our troubles are over".'

Negotiating contracts with the main tenants, who were due to occupy over half of the available space, and with the Norwich Union, which had bid to invest £24 million in Queensgate, was one large interlocking operation. From the moment of signing the stores had to pay themselves for any changes they wanted to the shopping centre. It was therefore only after they had signed that Wyndham Thomas went to the board for authority to let the building contract to Laing's.

Keith Maplestone was at the meeting and watched Christopher Higgins get to the item on the agenda dealing with the city centre. 'Higgins said, "I suppose we should nod through the £25 million and argue about some fences around the houses." It was so big there was nothing else anybody could do.'



*Queensgate: the interior of Aladdin's cave.*

**A**t long last, in March 1982, the day for the opening of the new shopping centre arrived. The project on which at a peak eighty-five architects and engineers had laboured, was complete. Keith Maplestone, who had himself been down sweeping the inside only three days before, had also kept the place under the strictest of wraps.

'We had never let anybody in to see it, not even the city councillors. On opening day I went down early and for romantic reasons opened it. I was given a great bunch of keys and unlocked the doors ... and, of course, nothing happened.'

When he got to the Long Causeway entrance, he saw a group of students outside. They turned out to be Dutch and they were the first visitors ever to enter Queensgate. After that Maplestone watched a trickle of curious Peterborians turn into a flood. 'By ten o'clock the police were talking of getting people out. At about eleven

o'clock one after the other the escalators stopped. They always do when they are new.'

The traders had a hopeless day. All anybody wanted to do was look. The place *was* an Aladdin's cave. It was a triumph for Maplestone and Len Jarrad, senior partner in Hillier Parker, knew what to do. He asked the Queensgate team to join him at the Great Northern Hotel and ordered champagne.

The formal opening of Queensgate took place the following November and was attended by Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands and her husband Prince Klaus. She was on a state visit and had asked to see a new town. Chairman Jeremy Rowe was initially disappointed not to have an English Royal, but all that changed when the Dutch Queen arrived.

'She was brilliant at it – a real professional. I think they liked it too. They were lost in London, but in Peterborough they related to the fens and

*Chairman Jeremy Rowe introduces Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands to the general manager, Wyndham Thomas.*





the Dutch engineers who had worked on draining them. It was a wonderful day. The crowds turned out with Dutch flags – it might have been a re-run of the Glorious Revolution.'

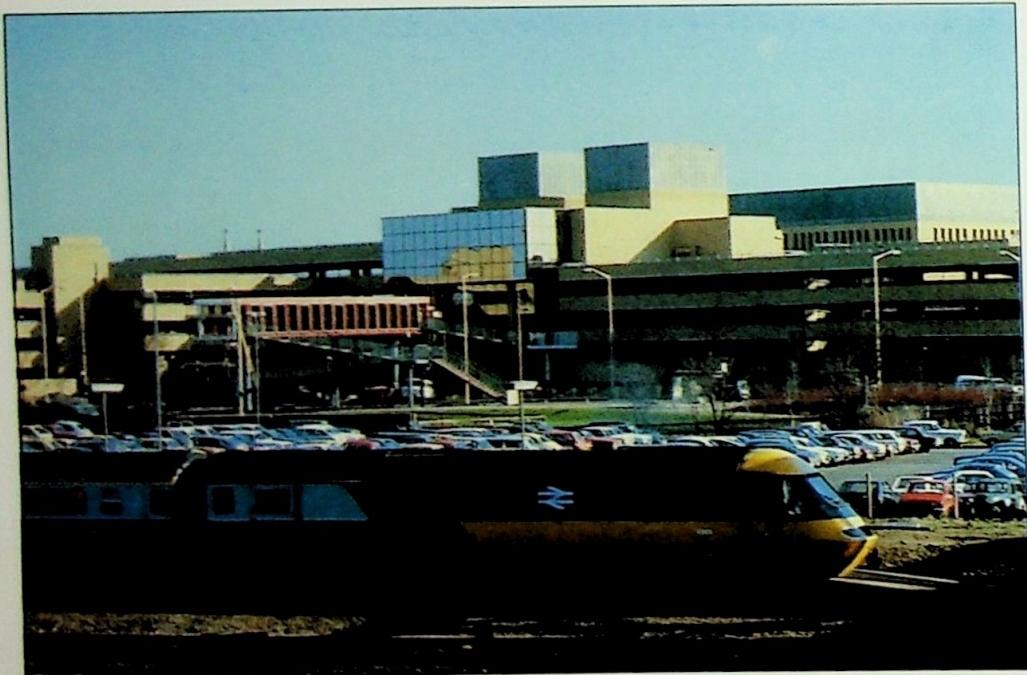
'If you set yourself piddling goals, you get piddling achievements', Fred Lloyd Roche was quoted as saying in *Architectural Design* for June 1973.<sup>27</sup> Derek Walker, his chief architect, later applied this philosophy to the shopping centre of the new city. 'A million square feet is hard to hide! Inconceivable... in the traditional guise of prison camp exterior and seedy night-club interior,' he told the same journal a year later. His

preference was for 'landscaped arcades, transparency, reflections' and a 'natural' feeling.

Walker's two metaphors – prison camp and seedy night-club – nicely sum up the worst aspects of English (and American) shopping centre design in the seventies. The new malls all too often turned their backs on their surroundings and reared up huge, eyeless walls against adjoining streets. Inside, in the worst cases, would be a combination of mean spaces and gim-crack decorations – the tinsel trappings of the candyfloss society.

In Peterborough the streets most threatened

*Queensgate.*



*Queensgate and car parks from near the railway station.*

by Queensgate were Cowgate, Long Causeway and Westgate. Keith Maplestone and Simon Waring, his project architect on Queensgate, had to fit the façades of the new building into their Georgian and Victorian street fronts. The most heavily modelled façade is in Long Causeway where leaded mansards sit above narrow oriel windows cut in Ancaster stone bays and carry on the vertical patterning of adjacent older buildings. The result is a clever marriage of the huge Queensgate with its more modest neighbours in the old streets.

Ed Schoon, who left the corporation to become county planning officer at Buckinghamshire (where the county offices abut a shopping centre in brutalist concrete), regretted the way in which, at one or two places the sheer bulk of the new building crept over the skyline.

'But where it faces outwards to the inner ring road, where the car parks and the bus station are, I didn't feel its bulk and uncompromising modern design were wrong. You would expect that in a development adjacent to a dual carriage-way. And the transition from that scale, through to the scale of the existing streets near the





*Queensgate: the frontage in  
Long Causeway.*

THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT





cathedral, is one of the tremendous achievements of Queensgate.'

Schoon added a point of consumer research. 'My wife is no great shopping expert. She is a normal shopper but she has shopped at Queensgate and Milton Keynes Centre and she prefers Queensgate.' She was a perceptive woman. In 1983 the International Council of Shopping Centres voted Queensgate (and another covered mall at Oviedo in Spain) the best in Europe.

In 1976, when Ken Hutton's new roads made it possible to start paving Cathedral Square and its adjacent streets, Gordon Cullen's ideas for dramatising the precinct were followed. By 1983 four acres of paving designed for walking had been laid and two axes of stone and green created. The result is a sequence of outdoor rooms that can stand comparison with any in Europe.

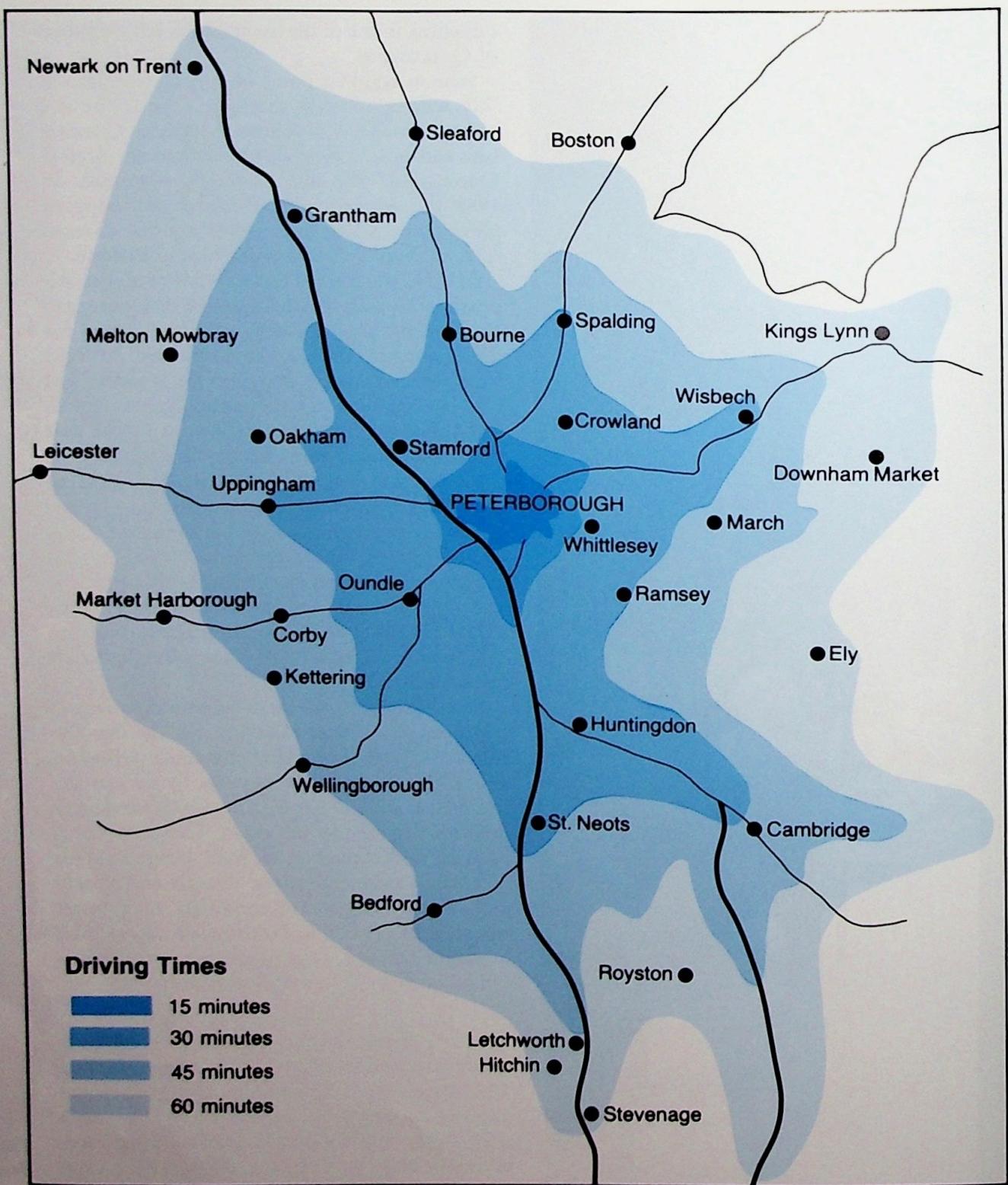
Queensgate was open and trading. Church Street was a promenade from which to glimpse the pencil-point pinnacles of the cathedral. Conservation work was complete in Priestgate and around Laxton Square new office buildings stood shoulder to shoulder. Monkstone House, completed in 1984, was an elegant crescent of glassy oriel windows. It was also Keith Maplestone's favourite building.

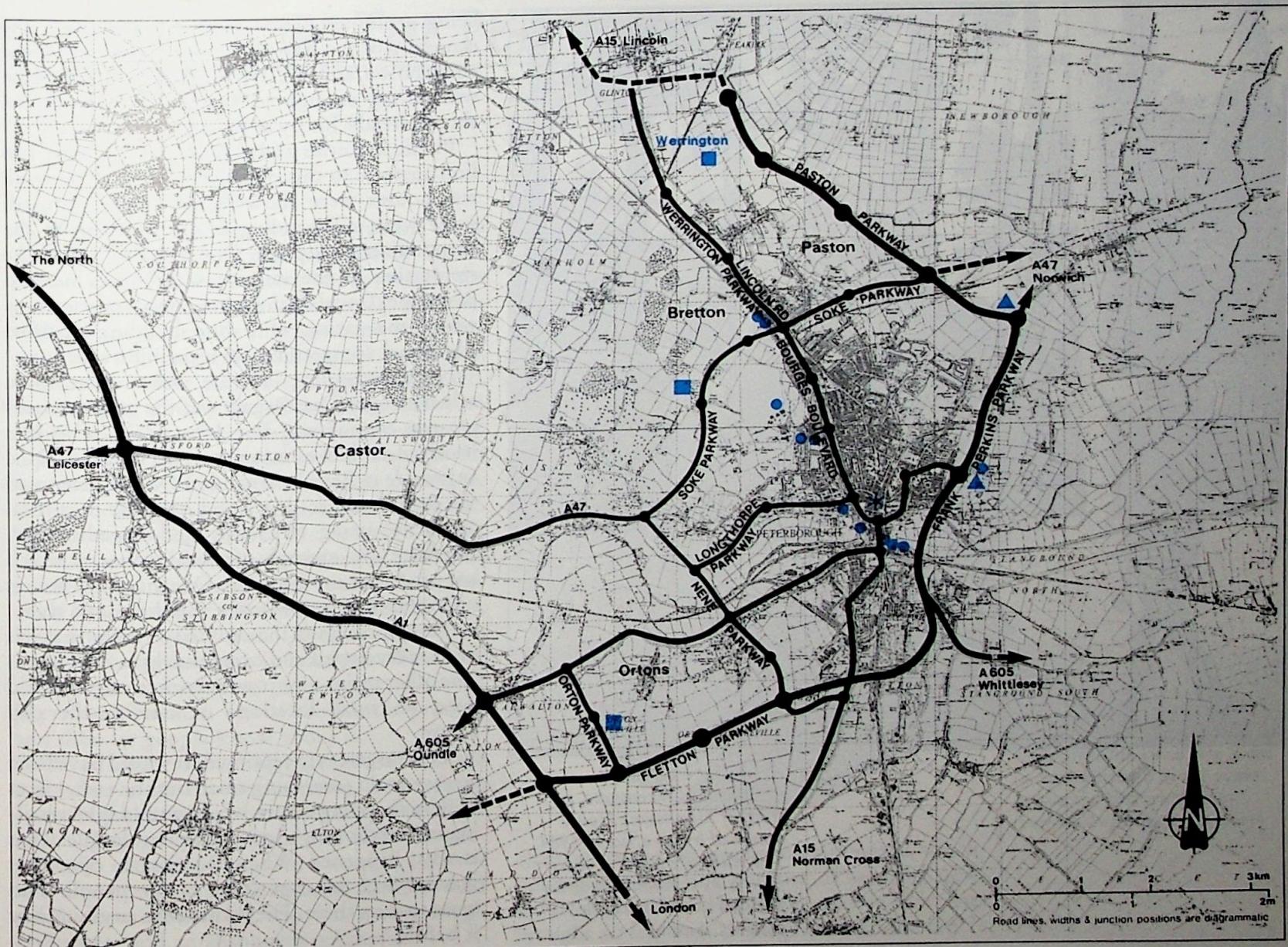
Peterborough's role in its surrounding region had been transformed. Hillier Parker saw the town's shopping hinterland stretching to Boston and King's Lynn (sixty minutes by car) in the north-east and to Corby and Oakham (thirty minutes driving) to the west. The director of research and expansion at John Lewis saw his company's store competing 'directly and closely with Robert Sayle in Cambridge, to a lesser extent with Jessops in Nottingham (both John Lewis owned) and, surprisingly but not insignificantly, with John Lewis, Milton Keynes.'

**M**ore expansion was to come. In 1988 Speyhawk and Dee Corporation began building West Rivergate, a £25 million shop, office and housing development, on the site of the city's ugly old power station. Drovers of retail warehouses – huge polychrome sheds selling toys, carpets, and Do-It-Yourself goods – were also

*The great central precinct:  
Bridge Street with, right, the  
portico of the Town Hall.*

## THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT





## RETAIL WAREHOUSE PLANNING APPLICATIONS APPROVED AND PENDING AFTER 1983

- APPLICATION APPROVED
- ▲ APPLICATION PENDING
- \* CITY CENTRE
- TOWNSHIP CENTRE

*Sites for retail warehouses:  
approved and pending 1988.*



*Keith Maplestone, the architect of Queensgate, in front of Monkstone House designed by his office in 1984. The sculpture is one of three figures by Anthony Gormley entitled 'The Place to Be'.*  
*(Roger C Austin)*

being promoted. Their potential to damage the economy of the city centre was a concern to the corporation and the two councils. Queensgate was strong enough to survive but would the shops already hit by it be able to hold on?

Public inquiries and consultants attempted to find answers to this question. Some of the retail warehouses were allowed, some were refused, some were still pending as the wind-up of the corporation took place. One approval led to the restoration of the railway warehouses next to Rivergate. David Bath reckoned that it was a case where the saving of a fine building justified additional competition for existing traders.

Notwithstanding all the other new town achievements, Queensgate was the corporation's greatest monument. For John Case, who was involved as chief estates surveyor, it has no equal anywhere in Britain. 'Swindon (which promoted the Brunel centre) is a good example of a local authority acting efficiently and expeditiously. But there is no example of a local authority which has produced anything like Queensgate. There is no example of a new town that has done that.'

'Peterborough is the only city centre that has been redeveloped and expanded by a new town. The other major new towns worked in greenfield sites, on small locations or outside the city centre.'

'Queensgate is exceptional. It would have been so easy to do something small but the task was to build a shopping centre which would take retailing in Peterborough into a different league. That is what happened. When Queensgate opened it was beyond the experience of the people who went to shop there. They'd not seen anything like it before.'

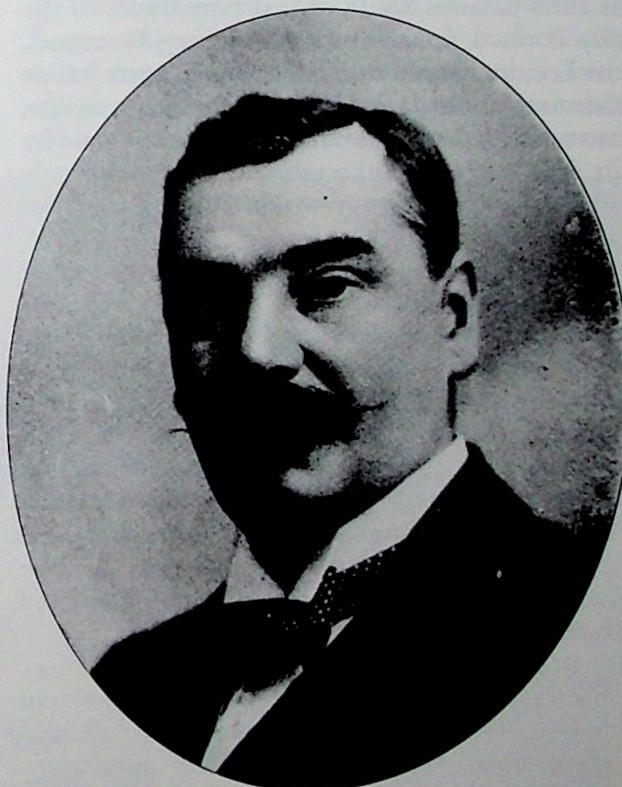
## 14. THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT

New town development corporations are in many ways speculative builders in the public sector. They borrow money from the government and put up commercial premises without any guarantee that someone will come along and fill them. Like commercial developers, corporations have therefore to get out and sell, and in doing so they use all the tricks known to public relations, advertising and marketing.

Wyndham Thomas, who was a propagandist for new towns before becoming general manager at Peterborough, took to this as a duck to water. Selling was in his blood. He accorded public relations and marketing a fundamental role in the work of the corporation and took a close personal interest in both. According to Ken McKay, who moved south from Aycliffe new town in 1977 to become public relations officer, the corporation's marketing philosophy, as set by Wyndham Thomas, was to provide the product and then let people know about it.

'Wyndham was involved right across the board and always in the copywriting. Advertising agencies get the ideas but they don't get the copy right. They go into glibness and facile abstractions. So when copy came in I would go over it and then send it on to Wyndham and he would work on it some more. He was a very tough taskmaster and an absolute workaholic.'

Early on in the corporation's life an industry and commerce group was set up under the general manager to promote the new town. Oddly enough this was not the first time that Peterborough had set out to sell itself. In a brief biography of J. W. Rowe dated July 1909, *The British Clayworker* noted that the redoubtable lime burner, brickmaker, coal and coke merchant, county councillor, city councillor, cyclist, skater and, above all, Peterborian, 'is also



chairman of the Development Committee, which he originated for the purpose of securing new industries for Peterborough, and which has brought no less than six large firms to the city.'

As this was the period that saw both Peter Brotherhood and Perkins Engineers move from London to Peterborough, it seems possible that the local development committee and, in particular, J. W. Rowe (the grandfather of the chairman of the corporation during the eighties) helped to attract them.

It was during that period too that Peterborough began to change from a cathedral and corn-market town to a centre for engineering and

*J W Rowe, chairman of a committee for attracting firms to Peterborough in the years before the first world war.*  
(Peterborough Central Library)

so acquired economic characteristics closer to those of the industrial towns of Lancashire or Tyneside than the country towns of southern England. By 1970 a total of 49,000 people worked in the town, nearly half in manufacturing – twice the national average.

Local efforts to bring new firms into the city went on up to the eve of the new town era. As late as 1968 Charles Swift, at that time leader of the city council, found himself showing Freemans, the London-based mail order house, a site beside the main line railway. Freemans were, no doubt, attracted by the city's railway connections and by its low wages – although the Board of Trade advised them that they would not find adequate supplies of female labour.

In the earliest days of the corporation Christopher Higgins and Wyndham Thomas spent time persuading the Peterborians to love the new town while business was attracted through advertisements in national newspapers and selected trade publications. The advertisements aimed to tell that the city was expanding and about its factories and offices. Effort was also devoted to explaining that Peterborough was not on the moon but 'under an hour from London' and later, as the railway service was improved, 'only 50 minutes from King's Cross'.

Brochures extolling the benefits of Peterborough as a location for business were published. The message was carried further afield by direct mail, 'a rolling road show' that toured suburban north London, and stalls at industry exhibitions. The corporation also began 'Peterborough in London Weeks' at hotels or business centres in the capital. John Case first took part in one in 1971.

'About all we had to offer were blobs on plans although the first factory units were under way, commercial sites had been identified and Sainsbury's had said they would build their first edge-of-town shop at Bretton township.'

**I**n some way blobs on plans were to be preferred to what was to be found on the ground, as the corporation discovered when the deputy planning officer interviewed the planning man-

ager of a bank which, after looking at Peterborough, decided to go to Cheltenham. The bank's officer was very frank:

'We came away with the impression that we would be living in the middle of a building site for ten years.'

'As a shopping centre Peterborough is poor ... and there are no department stores.'

'Peterborough is not very exciting or presentable. One would not expect it to appeal to the staff having to move there from the south-east.'

The bank could hardly have been more damning but worse was to come. Uncertainty about the future of the city centre was stultifying investment; Peterborough was marred by Fletton brickmaking; and there was a lack of choice amongst the houses for sale, in particular, there was a lack of houses suitable for managers.

The bank's method of selecting its new base was very methodical. A large number of towns was examined and scored for a wide range of characteristics. When totting up time came the results were: Swindon, 77; Cheltenham and York, 75 each; Peterborough, 71; and Bedford, 68. The company then dropped the marking system and considered the five choices on grounds of 'general feeling'. This led to the preferment of Cheltenham with its stuccoed (if peeling) Regency terraces and fashionable shops. Swindon, the industrial creature of Isambard Kingdom Brunel and the Great Western Railway, fell to second place.

Two principal conclusions emerged from the corporation's study of the interview. The bank preferred information from outside sources rather than the corporation, which it saw as biased. And it was the bank's 'thorough and painstaking comparison which threw Peterborough near the top of the heap; it was the subsequent subjective sifting which led to Peterborough's downfall'. The inference was clear. Concentrate on presenting facts attributable to reliable outside authorities, and pray that the decisions of other firms would not depend so much on subjective judgements. 'Facts, after all, nearly clinched this project,' the report concluded.

The corporation always stuck to the facts but its experience with Thomas Cook suggested that luck could be helpful too. Cook's were going to Swindon, and had bought a site there. The Midland Bank then bought a controlling share in the company and the new board of directors received a report on the move at its first meeting after the take-over. Malcolm Wilcox, representing Midland Bank, had shortly before been called on by Wyndham Thomas and when he discovered that the Cook's' people had not visited Peterborough since 1968 he suggested they paid the city a second visit.

Wyndham Thomas received a visit from Simon Kimmins, Cook's managing director, shortly after. 'He came up and looked, and visited some other places. We did such a good job on the presentation, and they were so impressed by the site, that they sold up in Swindon and came to Peterborough instead.'

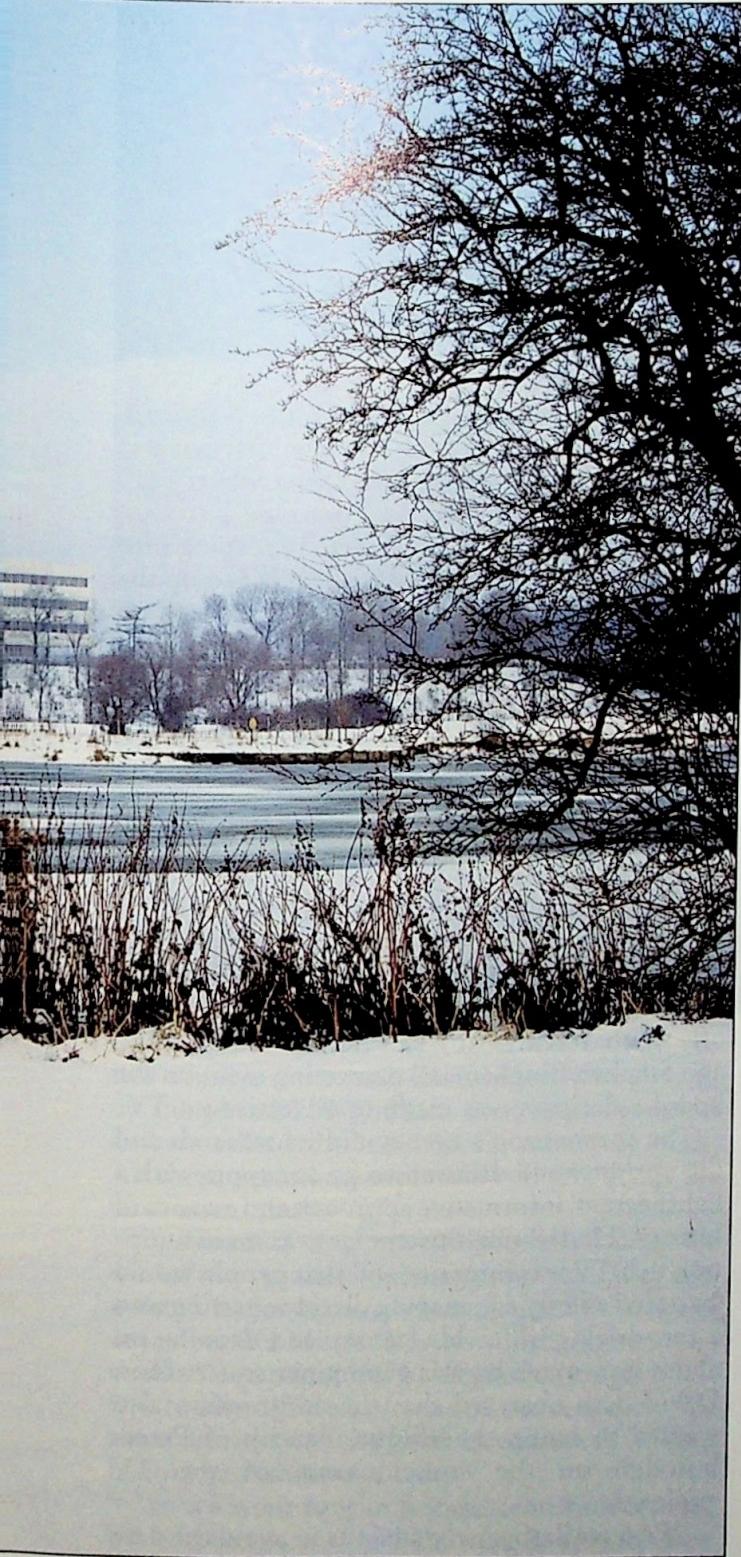
In 1971 when John Case joined the corporation, speculative factories were being built 50,000 square feet at a time, an area equivalent to about eighteen tennis courts. Case soon saw that at that scale of factory building it would take for ever to

*Peterborough in London Week  
1985.*



THE PETERBOROUGH EFFECT





build the town. His advice was to go out and build in lumps of a quarter of a million square feet. The board agreed and the new policy was followed for the first time at Woodston on the south side of the city. Case then let all the factories off the drawing-board. 'Now that's because property development goes in cycles. There was going to be another upturn and it came in seventy-two and seventy-three.'

What persuaded firms to come? John Case reckoned that the corporation's ability to respond quickly was paramount. Seeing industrial relocation in all its aspects – houses for staff, schools for children, supermarkets for housewives – was important too.

Speed of response turned out to be equally important in persuading property developers to invest in the city centre. Case recalled how, on one occasion, the corporation decided to move a road. 'We just closed it and moved it. Developers operating elsewhere used to be amazed at the speed with which we could make a decision and implement it.'

*The Peterborough office of Thomas Cook – for advice on winter sports!*

Towards the end of the seventies the corporation changed the direction of its marketing. The competition was hotting up. Milton Keynes, Warrington and Swindon were all campaigning harder for jobs. The board therefore decided to increase its marketing budget and appoint a new advertising consultancy. The account was given to The Creative Business, a London agency run by David Bernstein, one of the grand old men of British advertising. Bernstein in turn got Indra Sinha to research Peterborough and report on what made the place tick. Ken McKay read the report.

'What he identified was that Peterborough had no single quality that made it different. It was a combination of ancient and modern, a place where industry and commerce could find buildings in all sorts of shapes and sizes. But this unique combination of characteristics gave rise to something he called the Peterborough effect.'

Bernstein picked that line out of the 1,500 words and said, "That's it. That's what we want - *The Peterborough Effect*". It was October 1979 and Britain was in a mood of gloom and doom as it contemplated not just a recession but the sternness of the measures being taken by the new Conservative government. The corporation nevertheless went ahead with its new campaign, confident that its message of efficiency and enterprise was in tune with Mrs Thatcher's. The campaign's backbone was black and white advertisements in the business press, and the start of it was a full page in the newspapers headed 'One British City Has a Better Export Record than Japan'. John Case was astounded by the interest it aroused.

*The Times* and *The Sunday Times* were on strike so the advertisement appeared in *The Observer*. Case was in his office the following morning and at eleven told his secretary he could not take any more calls. 'Three quarters of an hour later she interrupted me and said. "I am awfully sorry but the Chancellor of the Exchequer's office is on the phone".'

Sir Geoffrey Howe was to give a talk to the Anglo-American chamber of commerce the following lunchtime and one of his political

advisors wanted to know if *The Peterborough Effect* was rubbish or real. The Chancellor was speedily supplied with figures showing that Peterborough exported a greater proportion of its manufacturing product than Japan. (The presence of Perkins Engines, with its vast export of diesels, was, undoubtedly, the crucial factor in the calculation.) The next day Sir Geoffrey incorporated the good news in his speech.

*The Peterborough Effect* campaign proved to be highly effective. Not only was Peterborough boosted to the level of Milton Keynes in the awareness of southern businessmen but not long after it began a *Financial Times* writer used the term 'Thatcher Effect' to describe a strange new dynamism which he detected creeping into parts of Britain. However MK decided to up the ante. Peterborough's favourite rival started to buy London television time. Ken McKay was in the front line of the promotional battle that followed.

'The London Docklands Development Corporation then launched a knocking campaign against all the new towns. Their slogan was, "Why move to the middle of nowhere, when you could move to the middle of London".' This attracted attention at Westminster and led Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine to order the stabilising of the promotional spending of corporations. Peterborough was not to be put off. With Jeremy Rowe, Franklin Braithwaite and Stephen Bingham, all marketing men, on the board a decision was made to advertise on TV.

The corporation's agency did its research and the upshot was a decision to go for spots with a lighthearted, informative approach and an aura of history. Underlying this choice was an assumption that TV was intrusive and that people would be bored stiff by a managing director getting into a car, driving off to his factory and droning on about how much he was paying per square foot. David Bath observed that the corporation also wanted to stamp the unique identity of Peterborough on the consciousness of the TV audience.

'We were desperately anxious to avoid the new



Roy Kinnear, Peterborough's own Roman centurion, making a TV commercial at Castor Mill.

town image – the new town blues. Who dreamt up the phrase? (Wyndham used to go berserk if anyone talked about it.) Never mind – it stuck. All these years on people will still talk about the new town blues.

'We wanted to get away from all of that. We weren't a soulless concrete jungle. We also wanted to draw a very clear distinction between ourselves and Milton Keynes which might not be soulless and might not be a concrete jungle but it was totally different. It was 99 per cent new. We were an ancient city with a cathedral, with a history, a tradition, a culture.'

'So we went for the Roman centurion coming back from the past and showing people the new

city. And we chose Roy Kinnear to give a humorous touch because he's a family man, not crude and offensive.'

Like The *Observer* advertisement that caught the eye of Sir Geoffrey Howe's office, the TV campaign turned out to be more successful than the corporation expected. Awareness levels of Peterborough went up further and people did not just remember the funny (some say tiresome) centurion. They got the message too – that Peterborough was a relocation centre. The TV commercial was never designed to get a direct response but when given a Freephone number it generated about half of all the corporation's enquiries.



*Sodastream in 1988.*

The new marketing campaign succeeded in giving Peterborough an image memorably different from those of its competitors. Milton Keynes, for instance, was the 'city of the twenty-first century'. Having no Norman cathedral, the MK marketing team looked elsewhere for images and found them in the future. They also put emphasis on excitement, a theme backed up by Derek Walker, the chief architect, with his drive for innovation in architecture. MK sometimes seemed, as a result, to be more image than reality. It was all lifestyles, high tech and solar heating – and the media jumped on it.

'The Peterborough Effect – Its been working for centuries', was a more comfortable and traditional message. It was therefore less provocative. Maybe it was also more attuned to the

English character. Its strengths were that it captured the uniqueness of Peterborough and executives remembered it. As marketing it was extremely successful.

The corporation's TV campaign was also the last in which Roy Kinnear appeared. His death, while filming in Spain, was widely reported only weeks before the new town was wound up.

As the eighties ticked by competition between different parts of Britain for firms on the move grew steadily fiercer. 'Glasgow Smiles Better' was followed by 'Bradford Bounces Back'. David Bath monitored it all with a professional eye.

'Nowadays there isn't a town of any size, or a county, that doesn't have an economic development department – and a budget. All are seeking to expand their economies although not many do

it very effectively. Our main competitors are the ones we've always had – Milton Keynes, Bristol, Swindon, Southampton to a degree, Bournemouth and Basingstoke. Basingstoke doesn't need to advertise. They are so close to London. They are turning people away.'

In the competition for firms the cities of the north (and even nearby Corby) were enabled by the government to promise capital grants. Peterborough's line was: successful companies don't depend on grants; what they will get is help to settle in, recruit staff and expand. The corporation is here to help, not hand out cash.

In these phrases were encapsulated the central core of the corporation's marketing from 1979 onwards. Research had disclosed that company relocation was traumatic, that companies knew it was, and that they only moved when they were desperate. Marketing based on the idea that moving was fun, such as Peterborough and other new towns had deployed in the seventies, was therefore a nonsense. The important point to emphasise was the support and services a company could expect if it was obliged to relocate. This was the kernel of *The Peterborough Effect* campaign.

Assistance could take many forms. Holidays from rent while a firm was settling in were one form of support the corporation, and other new towns, could offer. Another was flexibility over leases that saved firms from getting locked into factories that were too small for them.

Say a firm set up in Peterborough in a small, 3,000 square feet factory and signed a twenty-one year lease with reviews every three years. If, four years later, the firm wanted more space, the corporation could rip up the old contract, and assign the firm a new lease for a bigger factory. As David Bath put it: 'You can move through the system getting bigger and bigger without financial penalty. In the private sector that is not possible. If you've got a five year lease you've got to fulfill it. If you want to move out after three years, you've got to assign that lease to another company or pay the rent yourself. In effect, what we offer firms is a big financial incentive.'

Sodastream, the firm that makes fizzy drink

machines, provided David Bath with his best example of what this flexibility means. 'They started in 3,000 square feet and ended up in 150,000 and expanded eleven separate times. They started with fifteen people and now employ over 500 – the classic story.'

If, over the years, competition for mobile firms became stiffer, David Bath had the advantage that Peterborough had progressively more to sell. 'Peterborough in 1970 was a dull railway city. It was very unexciting, very drab. Most people knew it as a place where they had to change trains or just went through. It was diesel engines and it was railways.'

**A**s the townships took shape, the trees filled out and, most important of all, the city centre was transformed, the dullness and drabness disappeared. The city of engineering became a thing of the past. However Bath found that old images die hard. 'Despite our advertising, people still have their memories. If we can get a company to come and look at Peterborough, their perception of it almost certainly changes for the better. And in the vast majority of cases they are very, very impressed by what they see.'

Few things were more impressive than the choice of sites and buildings that Peterborough could offer to incoming office firms. It was part of being a new town with a wide-ranging boundary encircling thousands of acres of developable land. Established towns can rarely, if ever, offer the equal. Cook's and Pearl both decided to build offices in Peterborough because of the excellence of available parkland sites. But probably the cream of office sites in the new town was one the corporation did not itself pick out.

Peterborough Software grew from nothing, but when it got big enough to want its own premises the corporation urged it to go into the business park at Lynch Wood. The company thought otherwise and negotiated with the city council to buy a site in the grounds of Thorpe Hall, after the cathedral the most important historic building in Peterborough.

David Bath was party to the ensuing hub-bub. 'The proposal aroused an almighty row amongst

the local people and conservationists. A special society was formed for the protection of Thorpe Hall because everybody thought it absolute desecration to build in the grounds.'

It was mainly the city council's decision but Maurice Pickering, the planning officer, conferred with David Bath on finding the least obtrusive location for the new building. They subsequently concluded that, provided the building was well designed, the application should be approved.

David Bath recalled that the story did not end there. 'There was a hell of a row and a public

inquiry: but the development was approved and it's there. I think on this occasion we have been shown to be right. Certainly there is very little comment about it.' And Peterborough Software are in very distinguished architectural company.

Pearl Assurance was, likewise, attracted to an exceptional site – though a less controversial one. The firm decided to vacate its huge Edwardian headquarters in London in July 1987 having first put a toe in the Peterborough water in the mid-seventies. By 1987 the firm had 360

*High tech: Peterborough Software.*



accountants and computer staff in the new town. By then too, John Case had moved from the modernity of Touthill Close to a huge, echoing, mahogany-lined office overlooking High Holborn. He had become Pearl's chief estates surveyor and a key figure in the firm's choice of location. Why did Pearl chose Peterborough?

Case listed some of the factors that had influenced Pearl – staff already in Peterborough, the prospect of a ready supply of school leavers, and good communications. 'We knew too that we could obtain a large freehold site and that planning approval would be forthcoming speedily. This meant that once the decision was made the development could proceed quickly.' Case added that few towns could offer twenty-four acres of parkland, let alone the corporation's speed of action.

David Bath emphasised the coolness with which such decisions are made. 'Firms choose very carefully. They are looking for somewhere where they think their company will be prosperous. They look at the costs. It is a business decision.'

During a period when financial institutions of all kinds were leaving London by the score, Peterborough picked up its share of the plums. They were known prospects and the corporation targeted them. Another identifiable target was high technology – the world of systems engineering, computing and the manufacture of its associated hardware.

Peterborough had no high tech tradition so Bath and his colleagues decided to try and hitch the new town's star to that of Cambridge – which most certainly did. 'You will find high tech in Cambridge because the university is a centre of excellence in electrical engineering, electronics and computing. The place is awash with these people and hence the Cambridge phenomenon – the companies being spawned out of that environment.'

Peterborough set out to show that it was on the doorstep of Cambridge and to borrow some of its glory. As Bath admitted: 'It's all marketing. You are aware of terms like the "Western Corridor", the "M4 Corridor" and "Silicon Glen". Now



*John Case, the corporation's chief estates surveyor from 1971 to 1984 with (right) Donald MacDonald, chief finance officer from 1983 to 1988.*

there is an "M25 Corridor" and, I fear, an "M11 Corridor". Well, we were not to be outdone and so, some years ago, we devised the "Cambridgeshire Corridor".

This particular piece of marketing imagery is a boomerang-shaped tract of East Anglia with Cambridge at the bottom, Huntingdon at the turn and Peterborough at the top. And in 1986 the corporation produced a high-gloss brochure publicising it. David Bath explained the thinking behind the curving corridor. 'Down there is high tech and the university. But there too is very expensive living and very expensive costs.'

'Here, thirty-five miles away – dual carriage-

*Computer aided design/computer aided management (CAD/CAM) at Peterborough.*



way all the way – is low cost living, low cost land and low cost property. We've set our stall out for high tech companies on that basis.' The results in the short term were modest and those that there were could not easily be attributed to the banana-shaped corridor. However, with London's economic penumbra creeping ever further out along its radiating highways, David Bath thought Peterborough had grounds to be optimistic.

Up until 1982 southern England was the corporation's main hunting-ground for expanding companies. All the evidence available pointed to this being the region with the largest array of firms likely to be expanding and likely to be looking for greener pastures. However when the corporation reviewed its industrial marketing in the early eighties, other areas of search were examined. Discussions were held with bodies such as the Invest in Britain Bureau of the Department of Trade and Industry. The main sources of inward industrial investment into

Britain were investigated as well. This led to the widening of marketing activity to cover first the United States and later Germany.

In both countries the corporation adopted a similar approach. Consultants were appointed to advise on mail shots, to set up meetings for Bath and his colleagues and to organise seminars. By 1986 the corporation had representatives sniffing out prospects in Boston, Dallas and San Francisco.

At the peak of the corporation's activity in America Bath and his staff were involved in three seminars and as many as eight missions a year. David Bath or marketing manager John Bouldin would make a presentation about Peterborough and the consul-general for the area or a senior member of his staff would set out the national picture. A representative of international management and financial consultants would speak on, say, taxation in Britain, and American companies already present in Peterborough like

Thermo Electron and Dyna Five would share the platform.

The aim was to brief American firms on the European market and to make sure that, should they decide on a move across the Atlantic, they would put Peterborough on their short list of possible locations.

Board member Gordon Cameron had a chance to witness the professional approach adopted by the corporation's officers when he found himself in Los Angeles during one of the corporation's promotions. 'John Bouldin, our number two man in Peterborough, was there and was head and shoulders above everybody else. John's presentation was beautifully put over with good slides.'

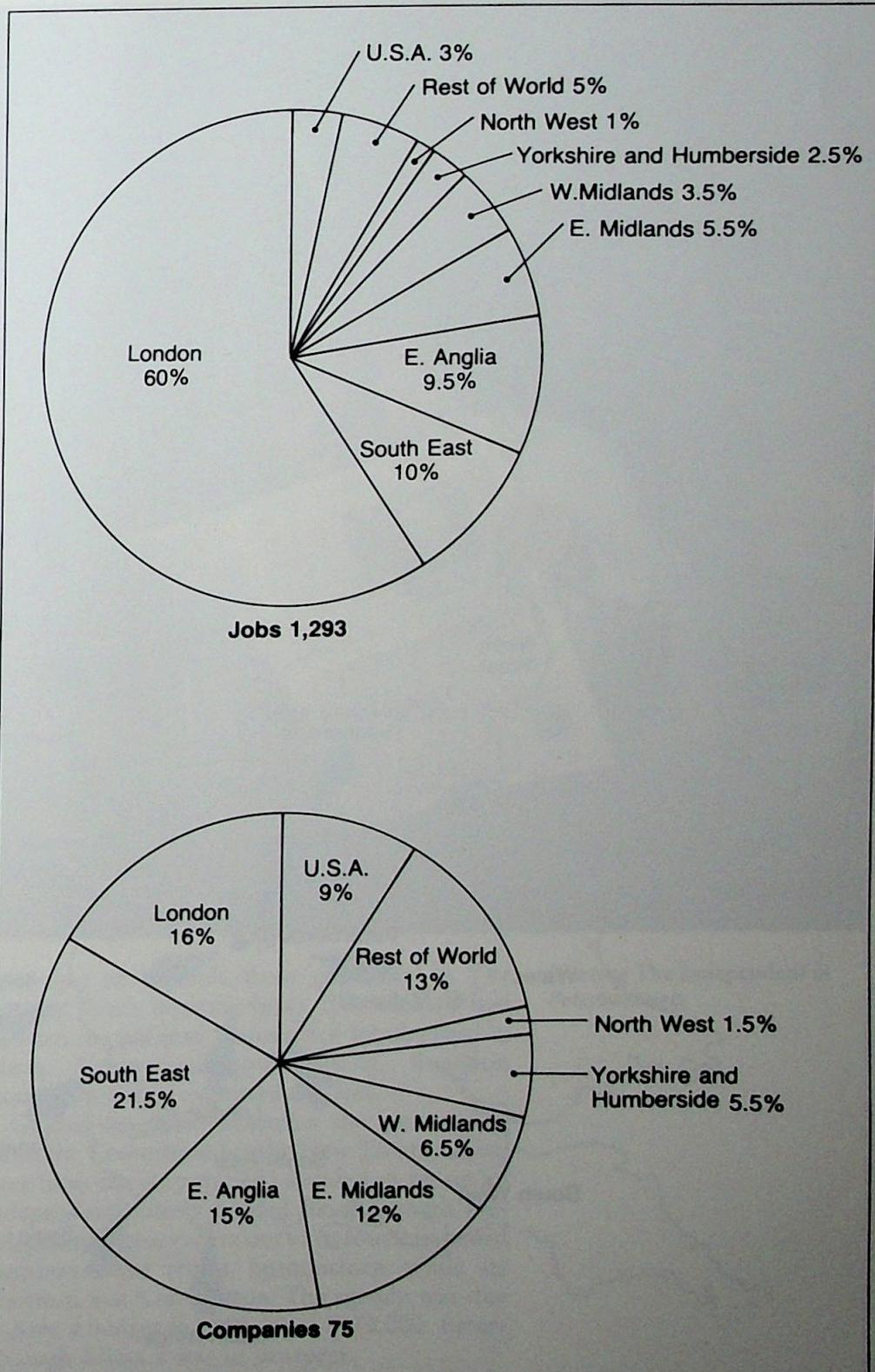
Industrial marketing in Germany came a bit later and followed a suggestion by general manager Ken Hutton, himself a German speaker. As in America agents were appointed and seminars held in cities such as Munich and Stuttgart. Board member Bernard Brook-Partridge and Ken Hutton were both heavily involved because of their ability to speak to German businessmen in their own language.

Overseas marketing was run down during the final year of the corporation's existence since it was clear that, whatever agency might be set up to continue the promotion of the city after September 1988, its budget was unlikely to be able to cover the heavy cost of working abroad.

**H**ow effective is new towns' marketing? Gordon Cameron, Professor of Land Economy at Cambridge, started asking himself this question in the seventies when he was advisor on economic and urban policy to the Secretary of State for Scotland. Later on he did studies for Coopers and Lybrand on the economic development role of Milton Keynes, Corby and, to a lesser extent, Peterborough.

Cameron's work brought home to him how successful new towns were in attracting invest-

RIGHT AND OVERLEAF:  
*Origins of companies moving  
to Peterborough 1984-1986.*



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ment and how effective they were at promoting themselves. What about new towns as an elixir for company growth? 'There was no evidence of it in the sense that, after companies got there, they grew more quickly. There was no evidence that they were more profitable. We matched them with all kinds of other locations and found no evidence of new town effect.' What about 'Peterborough Effect'? 'I think it is a convenient and good tag for marketing.'

Cameron found that new towns were, nevertheless, highly attuned to the needs of commerce and industry. 'They were extraordinarily good at making businessmen feel, once they were there, that the town was sympathetic to their growth.'

If the links between industrial marketing and results on the ground were notoriously hard to demonstrate, the results by themselves were not. Between 1970 and 1988 Peterborough Development Corporation attracted over four hundred firms to the city and as a result the proportion of people working in manufacturing fell from about one-half to one-third. Job opportunities for women were transformed. The city was still a centre of manufacturing but it had become too a prime location for service employers.

Peterborough, with 72,000 jobs, also gained new significance for a hinterland stretching way across the great fen to the Wash. As work on the land declined, Peterborough helped to fill the gap. By the mid-eighties the city provided work for 15,000 commuters. For those people *The Peterborough Effect* was a day-to-day reality.

As the time for the winding up of the corporation approached the new town partners decided that the marketing of Peterborough was worth continuing. Planned expansion was tailing off but the population was growing under its own momentum and unemployment was still high. As a November 1986 report to the partnership said: 'The review of the county structure plan ... predicts that some 15,000 extra jobs will need to be created between now and 2001, just to provide employment for the larger population and to reduce unemployment locally to about ten per cent.'

The report contained facts on the costs and



pitfalls of industrial marketing drawn from a variety of towns. Two things were clear. Many authorities had confused lines of command and the costs of promotion were high. At Northampton the city spent £50,000 a year and the county £150,000 more. (This compared with the £500,000 spent by Northampton Development Corporation before its wind up.) Leicester spent £70,000 and Bristol £320,000.

At Swindon, one of Peterborough's real rivals, an enterprise agency had been set up and given considerable independence. It had a budget of £400,000 and spent £250,000 of it on advertising. Swindon had, incidentally, just lost (to Peter-

borough) its valuable front page slot in *The Sunday Times* business news. The council had decided for political reasons not to advertise in News International publications. Swindon Enterprise deeply regretted the loss.

Guided by these examples the partnership (with the Commission for the New Towns taking over from the corporation) decided to set up an independent, jointly-funded Peterborough Development Agency. Five out of its fourteen board members were senior businessmen while its chairman was Ken Hutton. The agency was due to have a budget in 1989–90 of £470,000. Peterborough Effect 2 was in prospect.

*Printing The Independent in Peterborough.*

## 15. ALL CHANGE: 1980-1985

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Like the seventies, the eighties were years of upheaval – it was just that the problems were different. The corporation's first decade saw the laying down of most of the main elements of the new town – three townships, Nene Park, the parkways and the Queensgate shopping centre. There were economic problems; there were times when houses lay empty in embarrassing profusion; there was the end of the Labour Party's love affair with new towns; there was the rise of the inner cities and the cut in Peterborough's housing target. But right up to the summer of 1979 the new towns programme was still a recognisable descendant of that great endeavour set in motion by Lewis Silkin in 1946.

By the time that summer was over, the new towns had been dealt a mortal blow. It all happened because the country went to the polls and, as it had thirty-four years earlier, shifted Britain on to a new course. That election shattered the always slightly guilty alliance of the old paternalism of Eton, Oxford and the Guards and the probably older collectivism of the labour movement – an alliance one expression of which was bi-partisan support for new towns.

The heroes of the new age were abrasive, individualist and bent on enterprise. They were to be found in private companies, those makers of profits and creators of wealth. 'Quangos', which lived off the largesse of the taxpayer, were an endangered species. The carrier of this message to Peterborough was Michael Heseltine, Margaret Thatcher's first Environment Secretary. In August 1979 Heseltine summoned to his office at Marsham Street the chairmen and general managers of all the new towns and their equivalents from the Commission for the New Towns. (The Commission had been set up in 1962 to take over

the assets of the then maturing early new towns.) Wyndham Thomas heard Heseltine give what sounded distinctly like an ultimatum.

'He said he would put a moratorium on all building. We would not be allowed to start any new contracts unless we produced in a very short time a list of properties for disposal which would give his department a hundred million pounds. He just had to have it.'

'I feel sure he was exceeding his authority. He did not have that power as secretary of state, but one way or another he could have achieved his purpose.'

The rest of Heseltine's message was that he intended to run down the new towns as quickly as possible. He wanted too to wind up the Commission for the New Towns. This turned out to be rhetoric since not even Heseltine could rid himself of the remaining new towns without a residuary body.

Evelyn (Baroness) Dennington, former Greater London Councillor and chairman of Stevenage Development Corporation was, at the time, chairman of the new towns chairmen. She was also the *grande dame* of 'the movement'. Wyndham Thomas listened to her give an impassioned plea for solidarity in the face of Heseltine's ultimatum. "We'd always worked as a family. We'd always stuck together, and we had to help each other out."

It was a plea that was not widely heard. 'Some of my general manager colleagues took a tougher line. They didn't want to flog their assets. The commission should sell a lot more.' Eventually, and not without some ill-feeling, a compromise was patched up.

A formal government announcement on the winding-up of the new towns did not come until

4th February 1981 when Michael Heseltine answered a posse of Parliamentary questions (the transparent planting of which provoked a protest from Dennis Skinner, the 'Beast of Bolsover'). Dr. Brian Mawhinney, the Member for Peterborough, asked about the fate of the new town in his constituency.

Northampton and Central Lancashire were given wind-up dates in 1984 and 1985 while Peterborough, Telford and Warrington, were set to self-destruct by the late eighties. Milton Keynes alone, still only half complete, was given a reprieve until the mid-nineties. The Secretary of State emphasised that all the corporations would be expected 'to rely substantially on private sector investment' and that their further expansion should depend solely on demand for houses

and on private investment. Peterborough was given a wind-up population of 150,000 but warned not to use it as a target to justify investment.

**I**t was the beginning of the end. The corporation was told to cut Castor township from its programme and to draw in the new town boundary accordingly. All work on building houses for rent stopped except for a brief flurry of shared ownership homes in Werrington and some old people's bungalows.

Notwithstanding the gloom the architects seemed to do some of their best work. What were Keith Maplestone's design objectives? 'A building is what it is because of its structure. It is not necessary to add decoration.' Applied to homes



*Michael Heseltine, Secretary of State for the Environment, and Lord Thorneycroft at the Conservative Party Conference, Brighton 1980.  
(Richard Francis, Rex Features)*

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for elderly people this philosophy led to a cloister supported on slender wooden columns, broad roofs with generous eaves and a garden ordered by pergolas of Japanese delicacy. Age-old almshouses were never prettier.

The winter that followed Heseltine's ultimatum was a cold one. Fierce winds blew off the fens and put acute demands on Bretton's huge district heating system. The winter saw too the invasion of Afghanistan by the Russians and the onset of Margaret Thatcher's economic ice age. Not since the thirties had a British government introduced swinging cuts in public expenditure in the midst of a world recession.

Perkins, the great diesel engine maker, already replacing men with automation, was particularly hard hit. With the collapse in world cereal prices went a fall in the market for tractors and combine-harvesters. But the recession took every sector of the world economy down with it and the markets for construction equipment, generators and marine diesels dwindled too. From employing over 10,000, the firm's labour force sank, at its lowest, to below 4,000.

Had Perkins been at Gateshead or West Hartlepool, such a contraction would have been a town-wide disaster. At Peterborough there was a growing economy for the firm to shed staff into – even in the depth of the recession. Over two thousand new jobs helped to offset losses in the year up to April 1980, while even in the abyss of 1980-81, when a thousand jobs were lost, 1,560 were added. The following year over a thousand jobs were again lost, mainly in engineering, but once more there were many new ones – this time 2,300.

Nevertheless in the three years up to April 1983 seven thousand jobs vanished from the city's economy and those out of work grew to 10,000 or 15.3 per cent of the labour force.

The corporation responded to the slump by doubling its marketing effort, pushing on with getting private finance for new factory and office space, and by initiatives aimed at assisting small firms. Empty space nevertheless yawned on all sides – over a million square feet of factories at one stage. John Case took a detached view.

*Castor village looking westwards with the A47 road in the foreground.*

Sooner or later the economy was bound to turn up. Wydham Thomas did not sleep so easily.

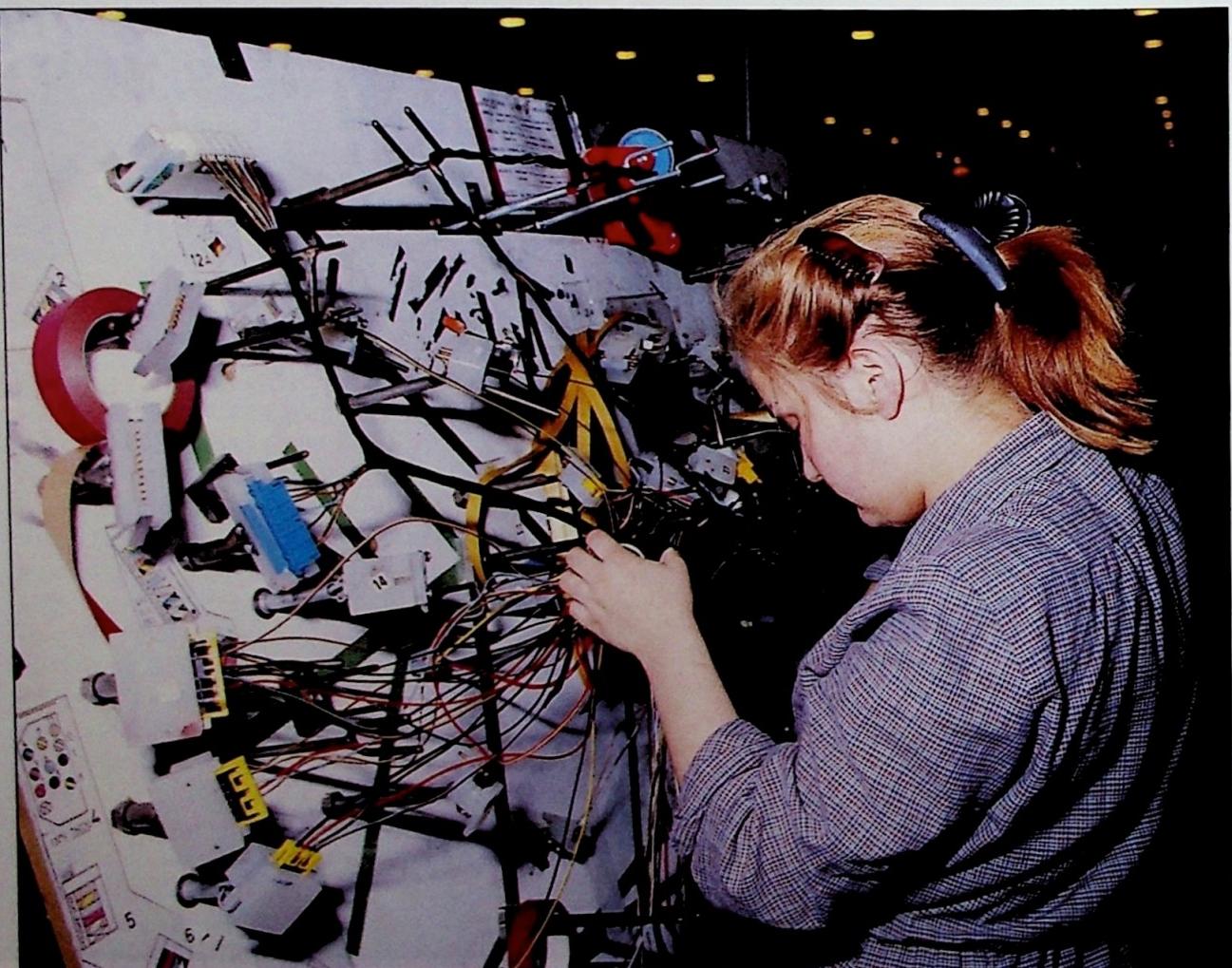
'It worried me that John took the property man's view. It wasn't his money. I have always been more concerned about public money than many other people. I felt the careful use of it to be a major responsibility. It was a very uncomfortable time having to go down to Whitehall and report all this spare space.'

For a time Peterborough was one of the worst new towns for such 'voids'. This was costly, because although all the factories and offices were privately financed, under lease and lease-back financing, the corporation still had to pay rent for them to the investors. There was no risk in it for them.

The corporation had no choice but to take the long view, sweat it out and step it up its marketing. The top priority was to get jobs to replace those lost in engineering. David Bath's remit was to welcome almost any firm – provided it promised employment.

'Nobody got turned away unless the work they did was really noxious. We wanted the jobs and we would find a way to accommodate them.' It was uphill work and even when the corporation succeeded in attracting manufacturers it had no control over their choice of workers.

'In this modern age the jobs go to women and younger people. If you've been retired out of Perkins at fifty, it's a damn sight harder to get a job than if you are twenty-five – even if you have



*Assembling an electrical harness for a Ford car at United Technologies.*

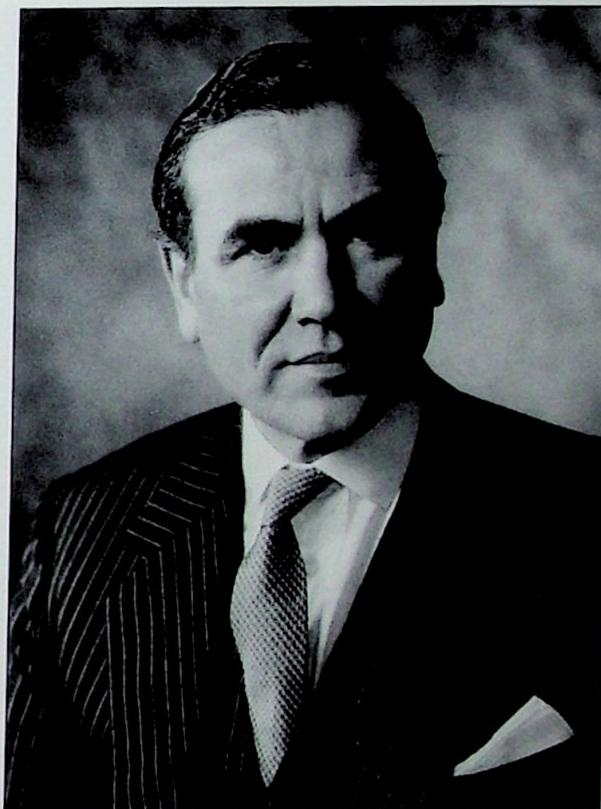
got the skills. We think there is still a lot to be done to get more hands-on jobs.'

**G**radually, as the country moved out of recession, the dole queues began to shorten a little. By 1984 Perkins was back to employing 5,100 and making 388,600 engines, almost all for export. And as the Roman centurion began to appear in the business press and on TV, so new names began to join those of old faithfus on the eagles of the legions behind him. United Technologies arrived to make electrical harnesses for Ford cars. Lloyd's Life Assurance moved to Bretton. The Nature Conservancy set up its national headquarters in the town centre.

Not only government policy changed with the coming of the eighties. The members of the corporation changed too. Christopher Higgins was the first major figure to go. Prime Minister Callaghan had knighted him in 1977 in recognition of his contribution to new towns and he retired in 1981 to the Buckinghamshire village of Little Horwood. Jeremy Rowe, who had spent the first twenty-five years of his life in Peterborough, took over as chairman. His roots were in the place and he was related to several of the city's great industrial firms – the Avelings, the Barfords and the Perkinses. He knew the town well.

Rowe had spent all his working life with London Brick Company and in 1979, the year he joined the corporation, he became the company's chairman. He was also deputy chairman of the Abbey National and justifiably described himself as a 'bricks and mortar' man. His appointment to the new town coincided almost exactly with the announcement of its run down. Rowe, by character a positive man, did not take kindly to the idea of slow decline.

Shortly after Rowe became chairman, two momentous events affected the corporation. In quick succession Ray Laxton and Jimmy James died. Ray Laxton, leader of the Conservatives on the city council, was the first to go. He had been a founder member of the corporation and, with Charles Swift, a lynch pin in the partnership between Peterscourt and the town hall. Laxton



*Jeremy Rowe CBE, chairman of Peterborough Development Corporation from 1981 until 1988.*

had welcomed the new town, persuaded his Conservative colleagues to back it and nourished their support for a decade. He was commemorated by having a city square named after him. On one side of its lies the pink brick Victorian college which the corporation occupied for much of his time on the board.

Peter Clarke, who, as town clerk of Peterborough, worked with Laxton for many years, knew the mettle of the man. 'He felt he had got so much out of this city that it was up to him to put something back. You don't get that so often these days.'

Jimmy James died shortly afterwards, only a matter of days after he had been presented with an honorary doctorate by his university at Sheffield. He knew he was dying, the university did too, and they brought forward the date of his investiture.

Bernard Brook-Partridge got to know James on the corporation and, when the meetings were over, in the bar of the Great Northern Hotel.

Over pints of beer Brook-Partridge discovered the many facets of a man who was a teacher, geographer, civil servant, professor, orator and life-long member of the Labour party. He also learnt how Peterborough came to be one of the proposals in the regional plan for the south-east.

'Peterborough is absolutely the Peterborough that Jimmy James envisaged because the basic concept was his. It was not an obvious choice. We are going back thirty years. It was a dying city, maintaining steam locos that no-one wanted. No city can base itself on three industries one of which is on the way out. The trains would not be stopping in Peterborough but for Jimmy James.'

'Only Christopher Higgins and Wyndham Thomas could have built the new town: only Jimmy James could have had the vision to see it.'

James, with his crumpled, smiling, bloodhound face was also one of those rare men whom both men and women love. Brook-Partridge, a tall, formal, military man, was one of the men. 'James was professedly not a Christian and one of the most Christian people I have ever met. He was one of those rare public officials – a planner with a conscience, a planner with a very deep and intuitive understanding of people.'

'He was a complete person. He did not have the intellectual arrogance of people who intuitively know what people want. He has a very special place in my affections.'

Gordon Cameron, who knew James too and who came on to the board about a year after his death, heard how 'incredibly influential' he had been. 'He believed in the new town passionately. If you are looking for people who created the new town it was Wyndham and Jimmy. I think Jimmy saw it as, in some senses, the chance to do on the ground all the things he had been saying in Whitehall. He was a doer. He saw it as the creation of good planning on the ground.'

The combination of two deaths and the arrival of the Conservatives at Westminster led to the transformation of the board. Christopher Higgins' departure was followed by that of Leslie Kemp, a building industry trade unionist and deputy chairman since 1974. Kemp was also

chairman of the Construction Industry Training Board.

Jeremy Rowe, with a near clean sweep at his disposal (only Charles Swift and John Horrell of the earliest members remained) was able to mould a new board. In doing this he went for marketing expertise and individuals able to provide strong support for the staff. He was also determined to complete the new town and 'to go out with a bang'.

Leslie Kemp's non-reappointment left a slot for someone with industrial experience. Rowe successfully urged the appointment of Franklin Braithwaite and subsequently secured him as his deputy. Braithwaite carried on the connection between the Baker family and the corporation. He had joined Baker Perkins in 1946 after Cambridge, a stockbroker's office and the army. When, in 1962, the bread and biscuit machinery firm became a group, he became chairman of all manufacturing and selling. He was knighted in 1980 for his contribution to exports. Rowe had a very high opinion of him.

'Franklin had all the experience of running a big organisation, he had marketing skills and he was an enthusiast. That made him the right man to maintain morale in the final years. He also lived in Peterborough which meant he could be there on the many evenings when I couldn't. When that happened I knew Franklin would step in and charm the pants off them. Isobel his wife is just the same.'

There was also a need for a county councillor to replace Janet Jones who had been obliged to resign when she stood as the Labour candidate for Cambridge in the 1979 general election. With John Horrell already representing the Conservatives it was Labour's turn. However, Rowe had met Emily (later Baroness) Blatch, been impressed by her qualities, and asked Sir George Young, junior minister at the environment department, to appoint her. Sir George mentioned her Tory politics. Rowe was unimpressed.

'I said I couldn't care less. She is the best person on the county council and I think she'll do it. They obviously consulted the county; he worked the oracle and she came in.'



'I asked for her in a wholly unpolitical sense. It was for ministers to decide whether we should have two Tories.' The partnership accordingly lost the political balance to which Evelyn Sharp had attached so much importance in the sixties. Charles Swift, leader of the Labour group in the city council, became the only Labour party representative on the board.

Politics are not, however, meant to intrude into the deliberations of development corpor-

ations. Appointments to the boards of new towns, as to the BBC, English Heritage or any other quango, are personal. Members are there to contribute their expertise, to pursue the best interest of those whom the corporation exists to serve; they are not there to push a party line. Gordon Cameron was impressed by how successful his political colleagues were at skating on such thin ice.

'They really do think about themselves as

*The board of Peterborough Development Corporation in 1988. From the left: Charles Swift, Baroness Blatch of Hinchingbrooke, Sir John Sparrow, Sir Franklin Braithwaite (deputy chairman), John Horrell, Jean Barker, Jeremy Rowe (chairman), Bernard Brook-Partridge, Professor Gordon Cameron and Stephen Bingham.*

partners on that board. Of course they are politicians and never stop being so but it never comes out in a blatant way, or as party politics. And it very seldom comes out in the form of personalised politics.

'You get their insights into what is going on in Peterborough in a way that is almost apolitical,' Cameron added. 'If they are going to talk politics they say, "Listen this is me talking as a politician, so you can discount it if you like". And when they decide something on the board, as a collective, they jolly well go and deliver it, as politicians. I won't say its ideal, but its a model that works.'

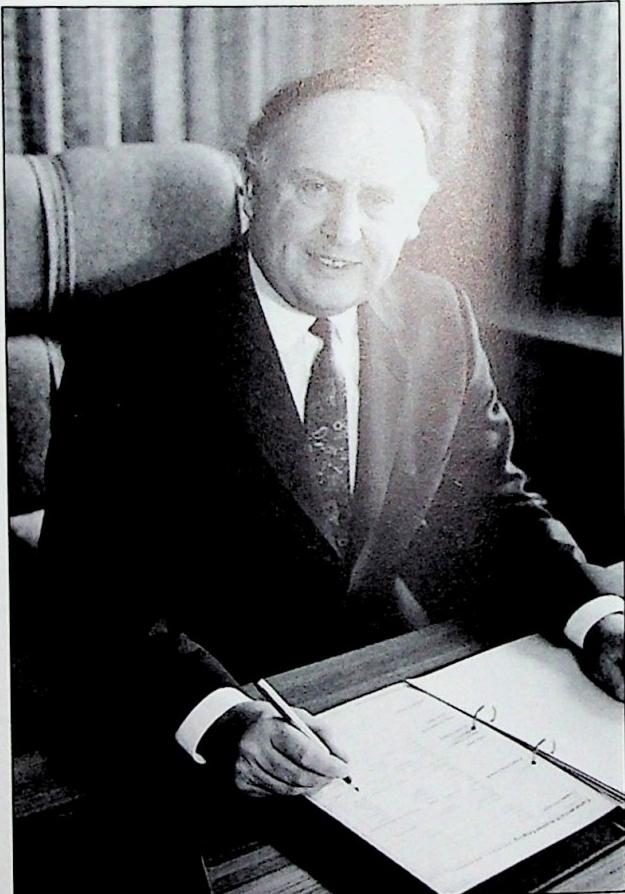
**A**fter the changes on the board came changes in the general manager. Wyndham Thomas was deeply depressed by the Conservative government's rejection of new towns. Jimmy James's death was a further, terrible blow. The two men had the same passion for regional planning and new towns and they had fought side by side in many of the same battles. But they were also linked by something deeper – convictions rooted in the same tradition of non-conformity, public service, and the Labour party. This combination of professional and moral like-mindedness made James a unique ally for Thomas. Cameron had a keen sense of it.

'Wyndham actually adored him. I think when Jimmy died Wyndham began to go down. He so relied on Jimmy's judgement and enthusiasm.'

Wyndham Thomas gave up his post in 1983 after serving as general manager for fifteen years. He decided to follow the action rather than preside over what he imagined was going to be a lingering death. He was already on the board of the London Docklands Development Corporation and when he left Peterborough he became chairman and chief executive of Inner City Enterprises. It was a vehicle for promoting private investment.

Wyndham Thomas was a hard act to follow. Everyone remarked on his indomitable personality, his driving energy and his profound knowledge of new towns. Jeremy Rowe agonised over the appointment of both his immediate suc-

RIGHT: Ken Hutton, general manager of Peterborough Development Corporation from 1984 to 1988.



sor and who should take over in the longer term. He worked on it with Franklin Braithwaite. After much deliberation they recommended the board to appoint John Beckett, until then chief finance officer and deputy general manager.

Rowe later assessed the change. 'Wyndham was quicksilver. He was all over the place, up to London to give a lecture, flying over to the States ... During that period Beckett was the solid anchor-man, and that was just what was needed when Wyndham left. For that particular season he was the right man.'

Beckett, who knew that he was shortly to retire, saw himself as a caretaker while the board deliberated on the choice of a younger man to take them through to wind-up. Rowe listened to Beckett, whose judgement he respected, and again consulted Braithwaite on the choice before them.

'We agreed that given the quality of our chief officers (and the few years to go) we should choose from amongst them. The difficulty lay in the weight of their talents. In the end we chose Ken Hutton, the corporation's chief engineer. The board agreed with our recommendation and with Ken at the helm we have never looked back.'

Hutton, a Yorkshireman, who possessed all the warmth and humour of his tribe, became general manager in December 1984. Gordon Cameron observed him closely. 'He was a quiet man. He seemed to have an engineer's attitude ... if you can't put it on a bit of paper and if it doesn't have an equation behind it, it can't work. I think at first I was worried, but Ken has tremendous confidence in his staff and they in him. He really does believe in them. He backs them. He is quick-witted, clear-sighted and very

authoritative. He makes up his mind. Bang! It's done.'

'I think we have done better under him than we would have under Wyndham. Wyndham was getting bored. He'd done it all. Ken has had the enthusiasm of being top man. I think he has given the corporation a fillip in its last few years. He has pushed us right to the end. There is a feeling we're still driving on. It could so easily have gone down – but it didn't.'

Ken Hutton may have been a doctor called to a deathbed but the patient had enough life left to justify intensive care. Furthermore the corporation had an unusual sickness: its days might be numbered but its works would live on. There would be life after death and much had to be done to prepare for it.

As an engineer Hutton was a practical man and a doer. His approach to management was to

*Nicholas Ridley, Secretary of State for Transport and Dr Brian Mawhinney, Member of Parliament for Peterborough opening Frank Perkins Parkway river bridge, December 1984.*



define programmes and targets and get his team working on them. In this he had, as he saw it, one great advantage. Over the years some chief officers had left – John Case, who had made an outstanding contribution as chief estates surveyor, had gone in 1983 – but all those in post had been with the corporation for many years. Hutton considered this a boon.

'Because we had worked together for so long, we were friends and understood one another. We also had mutual respect for each other as professionals. I regarded that as the keystone that would support the team approach.'

The work that the corporation needed to do before its wind-up was set out in a document entitled 'The Task Ahead'. It emphasised the all-important business of completing the physical development of the new town. The list was a daunting one. There were roads and sewers still to be built. The part of the city centre due to be filled by West Rivergate, the second major shopping centre, was still occupied by a defunct power station. All the non-commercial assets created by the corporation

(the community related assets [CRAs] in new town jargon) needed to be given incomes and transferred to the city or the county – or found some other home. The corporation's huge estate of houses had to be handed over to the city.

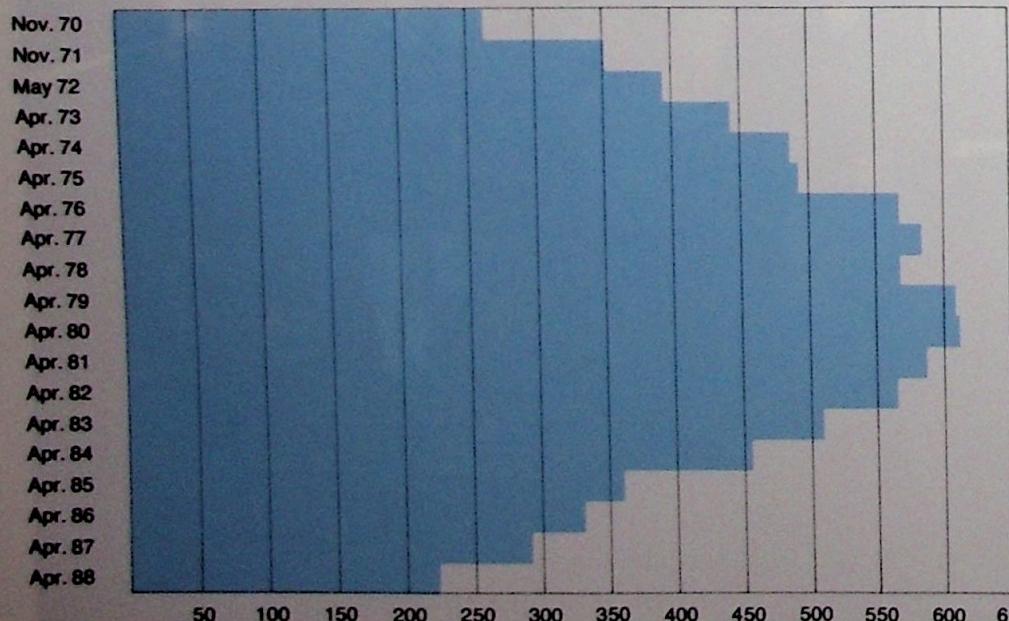
But there was an additional complication. New towns are juggernauts. They cannot be stopped overnight, not even by pogroms from Westminster. But they can run drearily down. Ken Hutton was determined that should not happen. 'I wanted to go out on a high note. We had started out successfully and I wanted the success to continue, I didn't want the thing to fall off.' The drive to sell the new town had to be kept up.

The creation of at least 2,000 jobs a year and the promotion of 1,000 houses for sale were Hutton's top objectives. There was scope to achieve them. At the beginning of 1985 the corporation had a million square feet of empty factory space and over 200,000 square feet of vacant offices. And out at Lynch Wood not one of the 170 acres of the newly created business park had been sold. Finally there was the vexed issue of Castor. Ken Hutton knew that everything turned on the Secretary of State agreeing, before wind-up day, the revisions to the Cambridgeshire structure plan.

With the tasks ahead defined it was possible to work on staffing. It was also important to keep up morale. Keith Maplestone and David Bath were therefore given wider responsibilities and became, respectively, directors of technical services and of marketing and planning. Hutton then worked with Bill Cookson, the establishment officer, to choose a core staff of about eighty to be offered new contracts to stay 'to the bitter end'.

The wind-up team was ready. It remained only to give it a date to work towards. Streams of letters on this subject flowed to and fro between Whitehall and the partnership authorities during 1985. Alan Simcock at the Department began by suggesting that the task could be completed by 1987. The county saw no problem but the city suggested March 1988 would be preferable. The issue was then discussed by

*Staff employed by the corporation in non-manual work 1970-1988.*



special tripartite committees of members and officers and the county decided to support the city. In May a letter arrived from Simcock asking for the corporation's views. Hutton thought that December 1987 left too little time to complete the jobs in hand.

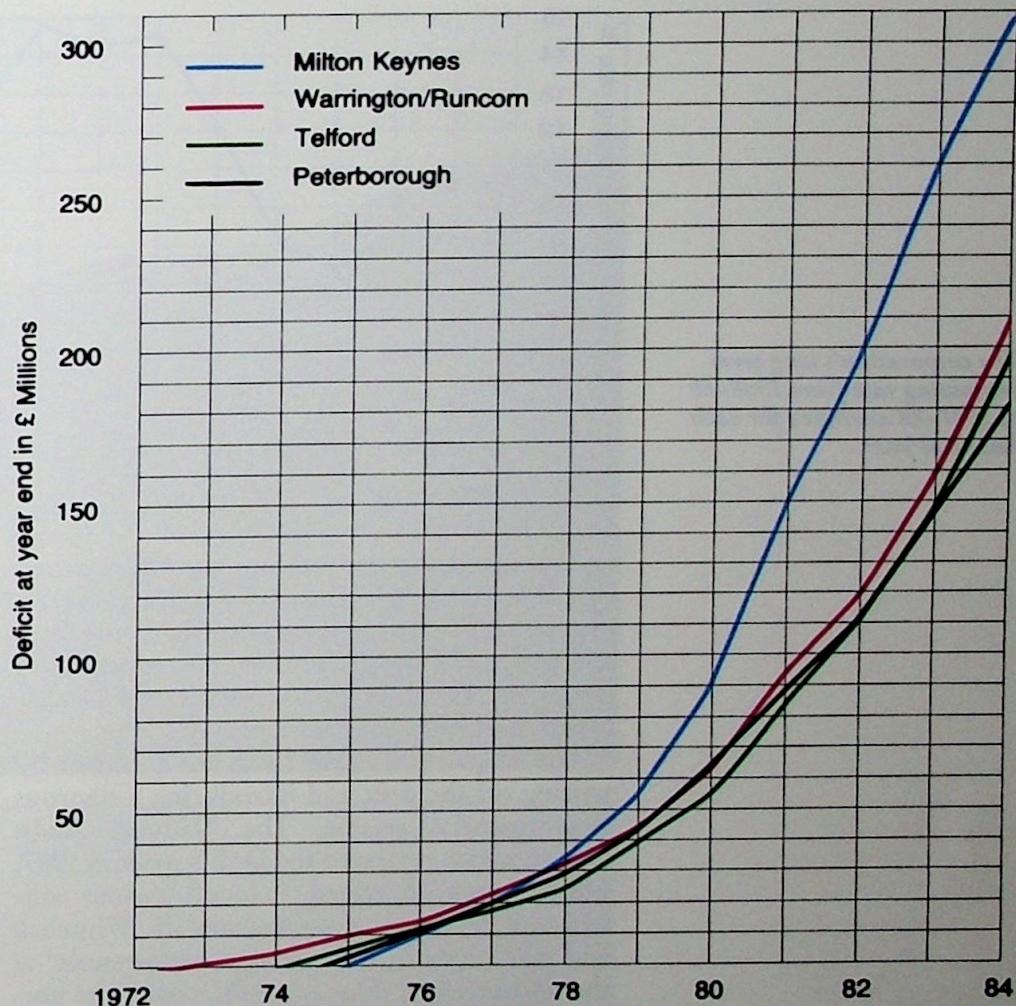
'So I set about convincing Jeremy Rowe, and he didn't take a lot of convincing, that we ought to go for a date in 1989. It seemed to me to be the earliest date the corporation ought to be wound up and would give us time to complete all we had to do.'

A report arguing the case for March 1989 was therefore prepared, put to the board and then to the two councils. Both the city and the county agreed to back it. Ken Hutton then devoted all his power of reasoning to the formal response to David Wroe, the under secretary.

In November Dick Tracey, the minister, visited Peterborough to meet the board and the chief officers. Tracey was taken around the town and given lunch. Hutton was asked to speak and 'again put a strong case for March 1989'. The minister said March 1988 seemed more likely but when he wrote, a month later, he suggested a compromise date of 30th September 1988. This was only confirmed in October 1987, by which time Marion Roe had become the responsible minister.

Perhaps the Department of the Environment was moving slowly during this period because it was dealing with a financial crisis without precedent in the history of new towns. It culminated in 1986 with the writing off of the debt of four new towns including Peterborough - £1,688 million in all. Considering that the early new towns were by that time showing a modest surplus of £43 million (with more than ten times that sum remaining to be realised), the performance of Milton Keynes, Peterborough, Telford and Warrington & Runcorn was an extraordinary reversal. According to the figures in their own accounts, they were bankrupt.

What had gone wrong? Why had the later new towns performed so much less well than their predecessors? Deloitte Haskins + Sells, the

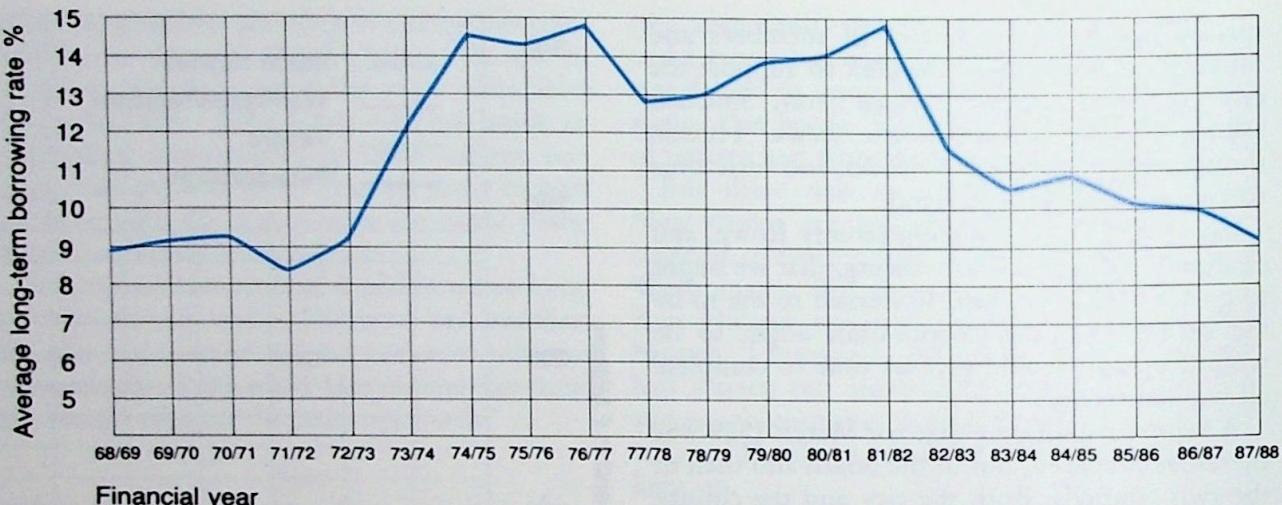


management consultants employed to advise the government, found a host of reasons. The locations of the later towns had not been chosen because they promised fat economic returns but on regional planning grounds. Their corporations had had to cope with slow economic growth, high interest rates and high inflation. Then Peter Shore and Michael Heseltine had arrested the growth of the towns after they had invested in roads and amenities scaled to much larger populations.

Deloitte also found that expenditure on social welfare was higher in the later than the earlier towns - partly to prevent a repetition of new town blues and partly because the squeeze

*Borrowings of the continuing English new towns prior to the write-off of much of their debt in 1984-85.*

*The corporation's long term borrowing rate from 1968-69 to 1987-88 averaged for each financial year.*



on local authority expenditure was not matched by a squeeze on Whitehall's expenditure. Finally the 'no undue burden' agreements of the later and larger new towns led them into expenditure which, in the days of the earlier and smaller towns, had been covered locally.<sup>29</sup>

The Department dealt with the problem by writing off the debt and introducing a rigorous new financial regime. The National Audit Office, which reviewed the DoE's work in 1987, was not very impressed. It found 'serious control and monitoring weaknesses' in Whitehall and 'variations in management performance' at the corporations. Donald MacDonald, the corporation's chief finance officer, not a man given to hyperbole, chose less official words.

'New towns accounting has been in the dark ages until the new financial regime of this year ... The change should have been made twenty years ago. It is awful ... The form of accounts (formerly) prescribed was so obscure that it bewildered anybody who understands commercial accounts. We have been to the board year after year explaining what the accounts mean and apologising.'

MacDonald went on: 'There was a system. There were controls. But it was much more led by cash.' Budgeting was expenditure led. 'Emphasis was on pounds spent rather than on outputs achieved.' And when the high inflation, stop-go conditions of the late seventies arrived,

interest charges mounted. 'You were reaching the position where there was no foreseeable way of repaying all the loans that had been made to the corporation. Many of those loans were not for development, but for the interest paid on the loans raised in the first ten years.'

It was financially very unhealthy. Deficits began to be taken for granted. Borrowing to pay interest charges became the rule as in Mexico or Brazil. By 1987 one half of the corporation's accumulated debt of £450 million was interest charges on the sum invested in the new town. For the corporation's chief finance officer it was a time of great difficulty.

'It became hard to concentrate on what was being achieved, the rate of return, the ultimate financial objective of becoming self-sufficient, which was achieved by the earlier new towns.' To clarify the mess the Department of the Environment wrote off £280 million of Peterborough's debt. This left the corporation so that its future income from rents and sales of property promised to be sufficient to pay its remaining expenditure and outstanding loans. The other later new towns suffered similar financial reconstruction.

Stephen Potter and Ray Thomas, in an Open University course book, remark on the austerity surrounding the growth of the early new towns and suggest that this may have contributed to their financial results. 'The situation in the



*Houses to be transferred from  
the corporation to the city  
council.*

1960s was very different. The financial success of the early new towns gave confidence to the government that eventual financial success was assured. Spending on amenities of all kinds was permitted on a scale that would have been unthinkable in the 1950s.<sup>3</sup> Potter and Thomas assert that wildly optimistic expectations about economic growth compounded that misjudgement.<sup>30</sup>

Few tasks associated with the wind-up occupied the corporation more than the transfer of its 7,000 houses, and few put greater strains on the partnership. Transfer to the city council started off normally under Part 3 of the New Towns Act. However this long established policy sat uneasily with Mrs Thatcher's government which was intent on diluting the role of local authorities in housing and giving tenants a choice of management.

In 1987 the corporation was therefore told to give its tenants a choice of future landlord and to arrange for them to vote for the city council or a housing association. However the corporation had already appointed the city council as its housing management agent. This had been done in October 1984, and at that time the city council had expected to receive the freeholds no later than October 1986. Furthermore, under the agency agreement, a hundred members of the corporation's housing staff had moved to an already crowded town hall. The board felt that to change course at this stage would be to go back on its word.

Jeremy Rowe and Ken Hutton visited Lord Elton, the responsible minister, in August 1986 to explain the corporation's embarrassment. Ken Hutton recalled the fruitlessness of it. 'We were received with great courtesy but from the moment we entered the door it was clear that the government was not prepared to change its

mind. . . . it was left to us to make our peace with the city councillors.'

Back at Peterborough, Conservative and Labour councillors joined in opposing the transfer to the housing associations. As for the tenants, the good service provided under the agency arrangement probably persuaded many to vote for the devil they knew. They certainly did. The turnout was 83 per cent and of this electorate 93 per cent voted to have the city council as their landlord.

When these results were allocated to the housing stock the result was for the city council to receive about six out of seven of the corporation's houses. The remainder were due to go to housing associations. Transfer had not, however, been achieved before wind-up. The Commission for the New Towns was left holding the baby – some 6,300 rented houses it hadn't bargained for.

Ministers would no doubt have preferred a different outcome but the corporation had meticulously followed the stringent rules laid down by Whitehall and there could be no grounds for complaint. And the high turnout demonstrated the interest of the tenants in who managed their houses.

Development corporations, as agencies of the government, exist only to follow their instructions from Westminster, however difficult that happens to be. But Peterborough was the location of no ordinary corporation. It was a partnership authority and its partners were local political assemblies not automatically in tune with the central government.

Housing transfer brought out the true nature of the partnership at work at Peterborough – the three-legged stool of development corporation, local authorities and central government. Any party can overturn the stool. On the issue of housing transfer, the government came close to doing so.

## 16. GOING OUT WITH A BANG

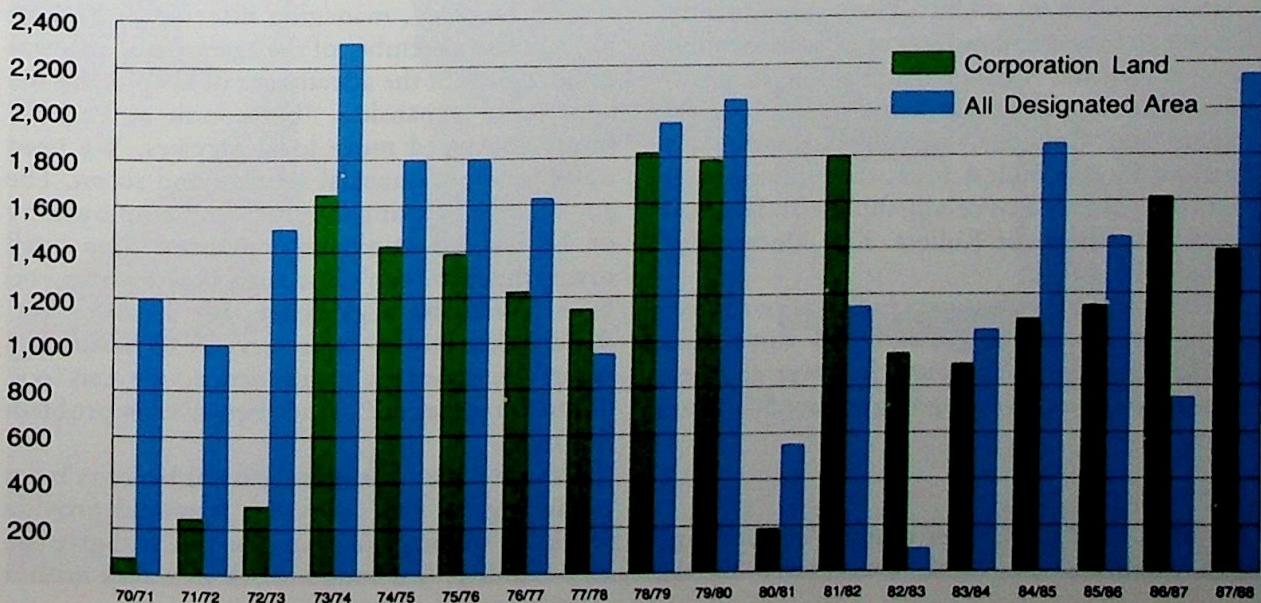
Tom Hancock was told that Peterborough was 'too small, too remote and too sleepy' to succeed as a home-from-home for Londoners and London firms. It was a judgement that could not have been more profoundly wrong. Thanks to the resources of the central government, the skill and drive of the corporation as a developer, and the receptiveness of the local authorities, Peterborough was given a new economic role, a new scale and new delights. By 1988 progress was little short of astounding. The achievements set out by chairman Jeremy Rowe in the corporation's last full annual report are a new town's fairy tale.

Peterborough was no longer a southern cousin of industrial Wigan or Wearside. It was a mixed service and industrial economy, a microcosm of London itself. In the twenty years since Anthony Greenwood had set expansion in motion, invest-

ment had exceeded £1,000 million: the number of jobs had grown by 29,000. But expansion was still going on. At West Rivergate in the city centre, on the last remaining major building site, the yellow steel skeleton of a superstore was going up. Riverside houses and flats would be built next to it. Out in the townships not only were all the office sites at Lynch Wood business park taken, but the completion of the centres of Orton and Werrington had been assured as well.

The housing market was equally dynamic. Builders were falling over one another to obtain sites. The first privately financed housing association schemes for over 300 rented homes were getting under way. And controversy about the fourth township was expected to subside following the decision that Peterborough was to grow southwards beyond Fletton.

Only a booster of Babbitt-like self-satisfaction



*Net job growth in Peterborough between 1970-71 and 1987-88 after subtracting redundancies.*

would attribute all this to Peterborough Development Corporation. Britain in the eighties was one of the fastest growing economies in Europe and within that economy Peterborough was on the edge of the most sparsely populated but fastest growing region. Then there was the electrification of the main line to King's Cross. It had made the city part of London's commuter-land – something that would have horrified Ebenezer Howard. And yet no one could say that Peterborough was just an ordinary town. Something had happened to it that was exceptional.

As wind-up day drew nearer the corporation pressed the final pieces of the new town jigsaw into place. All the office space empty in 1985 had been let and of the million square feet of factory space, only 100,000 square feet remained empty. The last office sites were sold off. The Peterborough Development Agency was under way. The corporation's assets were packaged up and transferred to other hands.

The filling up of Lynch Wood business park was the corporation's final success story. It had been on Ken Hutton's list of jobs-to-be-done when he took over as general manager. The first fish to rise to the bait was the Norwich and Peterborough Building Society. They asked the corporation to design an office for them and moved into it in 1988. Pearl Assurance and Royal Life then began to nibble. They subsequently decided to invest £50 million in offices for their own occupation. A competition amongst speculative office developers for another site brought Capital and Counties into the business park. Swallow Hotels built a four star establishment next to Sir Henry Royce's birthplace and opened it amidst a flurry of Rollers. Ken Hutton had landed all his fish.

"The whole of the business park was swallowed up in two years. The Pearl and Royal Life developments will complete it. Over the next three to four years we are going to have 5,000 jobs there."

In May 1988 the Queen visited Peterborough to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the

cathedral. She then opened the new Edith Cavell hospital and visited Lynch Wood where she started a commemorative fountain. The Palace wrote afterwards complimenting the corporation for 'adding lustre to the already lustrous City of Peterborough' adding that Her Majesty was a wee bit anxious about her fountain. Jeremy Rowe wrote back sending loyal greetings and thanks and a promise to 'keep the fountain going'.

The Peterborough Development Agency (a 'mini-DC', as some saw it) was launched in January 1988 with Ken Hutton as its chairman. The enormity of 'selling' a city was clearly spelt out in the agency's inaugural brochure. 'Around £1.4 million of the corporation's resources have been spent each year recently on marketing and promoting Peterborough in the United Kingdom, the United States and Europe. To mount an effective campaign for the United Kingdom alone would cost £0.5 million a year.'

Brian Mawhinney, Member of Parliament for Peterborough, justified such expenditure. 'With the ending of the development corporation, we now need an organisation, realistic in its economic understanding as well as in its community concern, to attract other businesses and industry. With these will come jobs leading to more prosperity. This, in turn, will produce even finer facilities.'

John Devaney, managing director of Perkins Engines and a member of the agency's board, was emphatic about the advantages of keeping up the impetus of expansion. 'Let's look at Perkins' future. We need more local services. We need travel services, financial services and so on. The guy out there cutting the grass isn't employed by us. He is a self-employed contractor. In a small town where you can't find such a contractor, you have to employ a gardener. We'd rather not. We'd rather buy in these services so that if and when the economy turns down, we can say, "Don't come again". And then it's his problem not mine.'

Devaney also saw more general benefits from expanding the city's services. It would provide work for women and young people and give the city stability. 'I'd rather work in a city with a



*The Queen at Peterborough Business Park, Lynch Wood.  
(Peterborough Evening Telegraph)*

stable and relatively thriving backdrop than in one with unemployment and a lack of services. I could argue that I would pay a bit less per hour in the less thriving city, but there would be offsets – tensions, differences of opinion with the unions and unemployment-created aggravation.

'I would rather work in a successful background and that is one of my reasons for supporting the development agency. To the degree that the city succeeds, that's better for us.'

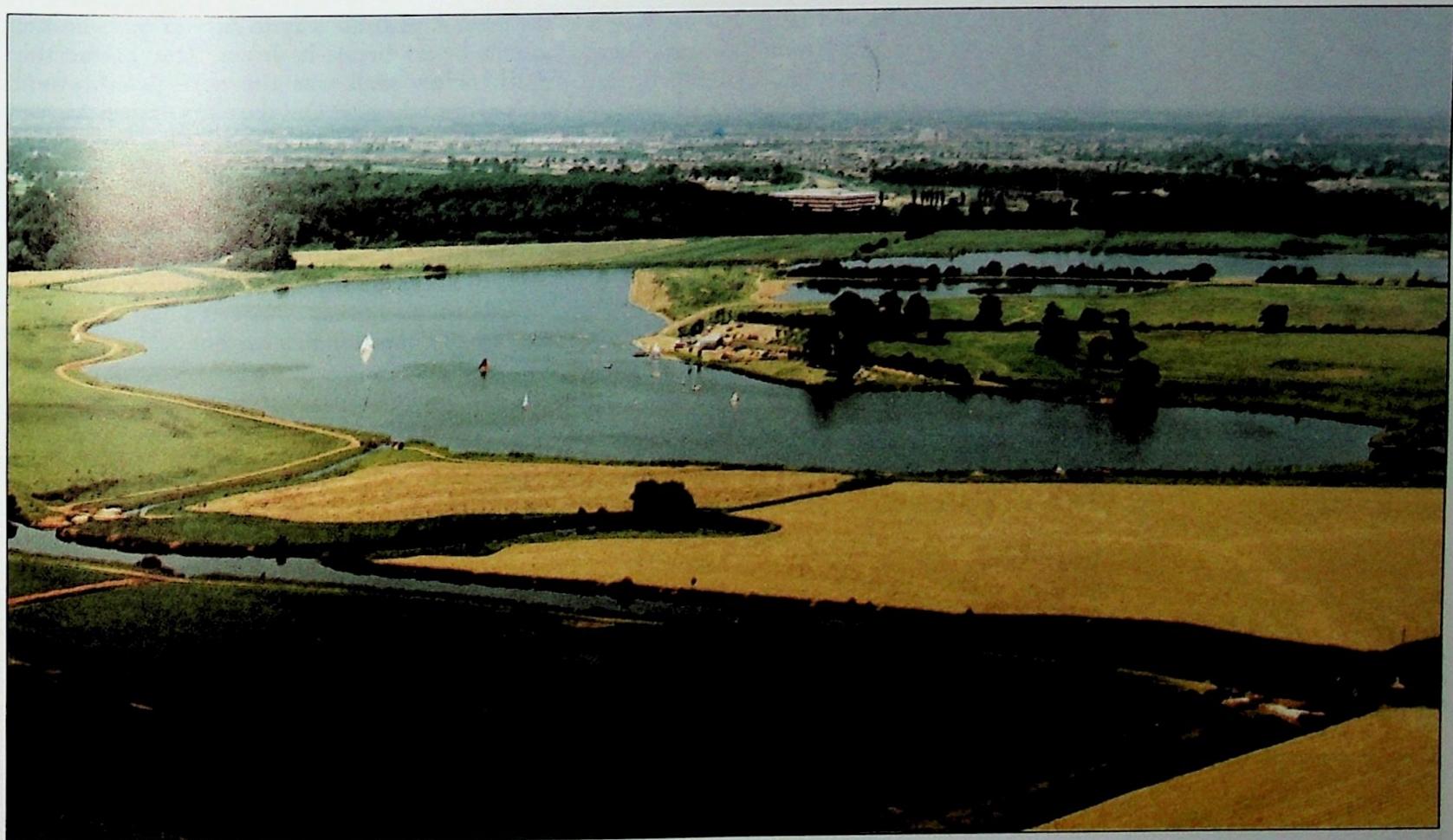
Devaney also saw the agency acting as a ginger group if the city began to look tatty and run down. '...there is a feeling that the development corporation did a pretty good job but that the council could screw it all up. So I think there is an element of protection and concern behind the formation of the agency. It's not the only factor, but in my mind it is there just in case things start to go off the rails.'

Transferring the corporation's fiefdom of property was a huge task. At its peak, two years before wind-up, the commercial part of this estate – offices, factories, warehouses and shops – pulled in rents worth £14 million, double that of any other new town except Milton Keynes. With certain important exceptions all these properties were handed over to the Commission for the New Towns.

The commission was, in effect, the corporation's residuary legatee and Paul Way, a submariner who became the corporation's chief administrative officer (as well as a loyal supporter of the Nene Valley Steam Railway), was chosen as its representative in Peterborough. Like a lawyer after a death, Way's role was to tidy up the estate. This involved selling the commercial assets at the highest possible price while observing the commission's remit 'to pay due regard to

*Prince Edward, with Paul Way, chief administrative officer, being shown specially franked envelopes carried by the Nene Valley Railway when he opened the extension into Peterborough in 1986. Mary Walker, the corporation's first member of staff, looks on.*





the convenience and welfare of persons residing, working or carrying on business there'. Way was also to be responsible for assisting the commission 'quite rapidly to start to fulfil its policy of disengagement'. He expected this to be substantially complete within three years.

The rest of the corporation's estate was made up of those non-commercial assets which had been created to improve the quality of life and make the new town more appealing to investors. The estate included the huge multi-purpose Cresset, other smaller community centres and a vast empire of green. Nene Park alone extended to over 1,600 acres. Other parks, woods and verges amounted to nearly 1,500 more.

Readyng these assets for transfer involved lengthy negotiations with the Department of the

Environment and the city council, which was to be the main recipient of them. The object was to package together commercial properties and community assets so that the rents from the one were sufficient to pay for the running costs of the other. In the case of the Cresset and Lady Lodge Arts Centre, ways had first to be found to reduce running costs. Donald MacDonald indicated the magnitude of the packaging.

'The CRAs (community related assets) in Northampton were far smaller than here. They had no Nene Park. Northampton's CRAs involved an expenditure of about £400,000 to £450,000 a year - mainly on landscaping and community facilities. Our running costs are about £900,000 a year but £400,000 of that is Nene Park.'

*Nene Park with Peterborough in the distance.*

Matching amenities and rents and creating a trust to manage Nene Park went on apace during 1988. The Department of the Environment was supportive. Packages containing commercial properties with rents sufficient to maintain Nene Park and the other amenities of the new town at the standard achieved by the corporation were, after much hard bargaining, agreed. Agreeing to this level of support was a price the government had been obliged to pay ever since Michael Heseltine had ordered a speedy winding-up of the new towns. Without it the local authorities involved in new town negotiations, under pressure to reduce their expenditure, would have refused to collaborate.

The final ceremonies for the handing over of the community assets to the city and the Nene Trust took place only weeks before the corporation was wound up. Yet another of the corporation's remaining goals had been achieved. No other new town had managed it.

*Residents of Sutton protest against the corporation's expansion plan.*

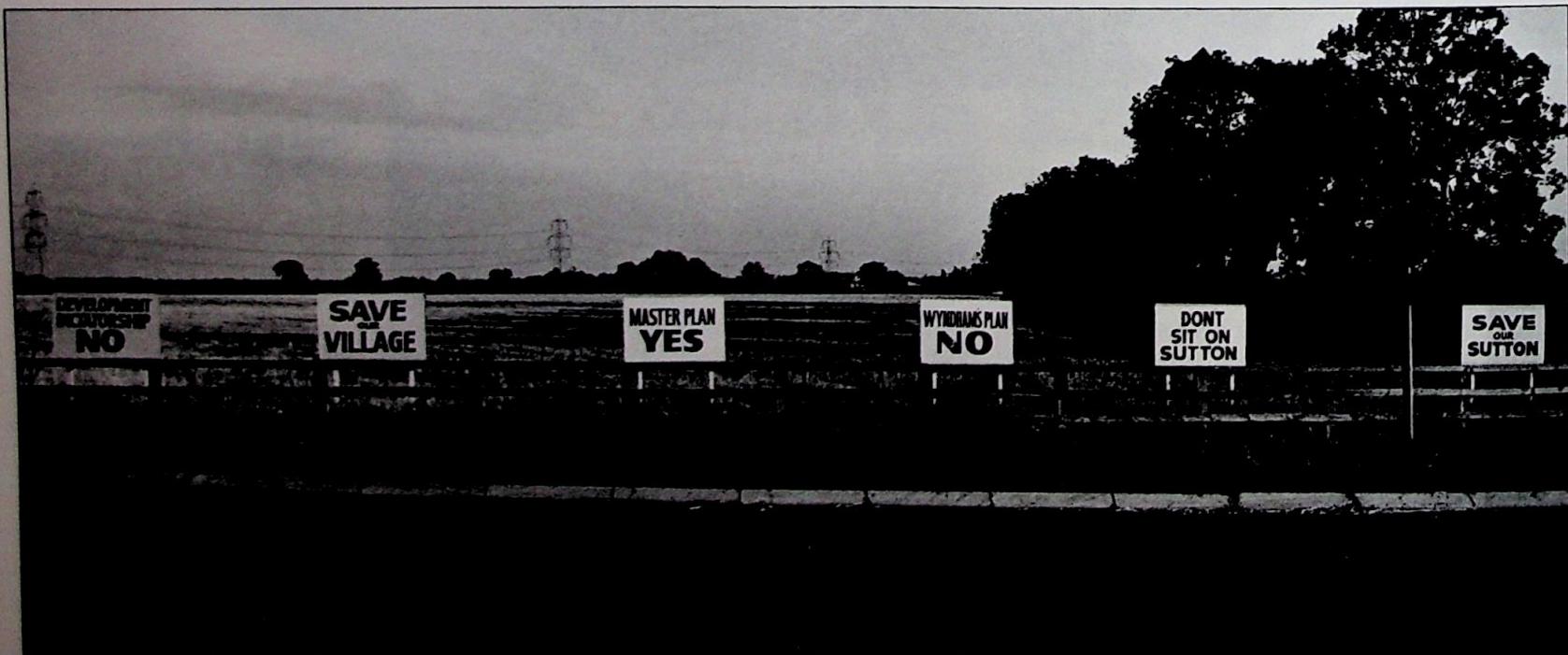
**W**hat lessons are there to be learnt from the vast investment engineered by the government in one small country town on the edge of

the fens? A possible way to answer this question would be to break it down. Did partnership work? How well was the new Peterborough tacked onto the old? Did the corporation succeed in co-ordinating its programmes for houses and jobs? Did marketing bring results? Why were the eighties more successful than the seventies? And so on.

The answers to most of these questions have already emerged in the course of telling the tale of Peterborough's twenty years as a new town. But there is one question that has not been addressed. What about the people who would have preferred a quiet life and for whom the new town was an unwelcome intrusion?

There were people who felt like that almost up to the very end. Eileen Mulhern and her family, the first to arrive, encountered people for whom the benefit of better shops and roads in no way compensated for the upheaval of building them. 'Some people said to us, "We wouldn't have needed all these stores and all these roadworks if you lot had not come"'.

Sometimes the opposition was more strident. 'Development Dictatorship NO': 'Save our





*Westgate c. 1900. Change always creates losers.*  
(Peterborough Museum)

Sutton': 'Wyndham's Plan NO', shouted placards beside the A47 at the time when the corporation was promoting the fourth township.

Living with such barbs is an occupational hazard for all those involved in making change. It has always been so. For John Clare it was the enclosure of the commons that seemed to be turning the world inside out. He opposed it with all his heart and there are few passages in English literature more pathetic than his description of the 'little mouldywharps', the moles, driven out by the powerful enclosers:

Inclosure like a Buonapart let not a thing  
remain  
It levelled every bush and tree and levelled  
every hill  
And hung the moles for traitors – though the  
brook is running still  
It runs a naked brook cold and chill.

The enclosure of the commons ushered in a new class of prosperous farmers – the yuppies of their time – and deprived the villagers of long prized freedoms. Peterborough Development Corporation was an agency of an elected Parliament not a bullying modern-day Buonapart, but for families forced to sell much-loved houses to make way for parkways such distinctions are academic. Change always creates losers and some there were in expanding Peterborough.

Such people cannot be ignored but they were the exception. For many, many more Nene Park, the easy roads, the expanding choice of jobs and houses, the quiet splendour brought to Cathedral Square and all the other fruits of twenty years of effort were more than a new town. They were a new way of life – a new England. John Devaney at Perkins struggled to pin down the effect of these benevolent changes.

'I am talking about something intangible but I



*'Something intangible.'*

think the feel of the city is progressive now. You can go to other cities which have a feeling of depression, of being stuck. Peterborough has an up feeling.' Peterborough does have an up feeling and its architect was the development corporation.

A drive north from London on the Edinburgh road is a drive through the heartland of the English garden city movement. It is also a story of a succession of attempts to provide an alternative to the infinite spread of the metropolis. Just

over twenty miles from Charing Cross and first in the sequence, though not in time, comes Welwyn Garden City – formal, neo-Georgian and overflowing with flowering shrubs. Next comes Stevenage – beginning to look dated. Its earlier houses, with their Festival of Britain ironwork and porches, are temporarily part of that drab territory which lies between the thrill of the new and the romance of the old. Six miles on lies Letchworth, pioneer garden city – all gables, gardens and white pebbledash, a place of unmistakable charm.



Peterborough is more than twice as far from London as Letchworth (further north in fact than Birmingham) and by the end of 1988 it too was part of the history of metropolitan containment. Did it mark too the end of over forty years of governmental effort to find ways to manage the growth of London?

It looked like it. Westminster still believed firmly in development corporations – but for inner cities. That concern for urban renewal which Anthony Greenwood had expressed when he set Peterborough's expansion in motion, had

become overriding. The new frontier was urban forestry in the Black Country not country parks in places like the Nene Valley.

Regional planning was in the doldrums – and bearing in mind the fate of the forecasts on which the South-East Study was based, perhaps that was not surprising. The government was no longer interested in saying where urban development should take place. It was prepared to forecast increases in households needing to be housed, but preferred to leave it to developers and county planning committees to identify sites.

*Peterborough cathedral from the Embankment by the river Nene.*



Lord Hanson's successful bid for permission to recycle the Fletton brickfields illustrated perfectly the way the government intended major developments to emerge.

Had conservation of the environment been forgotten? Michael Heseltine, changed perhaps by his journey from the Cabinet to the back benches, feared it had. In March 1988 he wrote a *cri de coeur* to Environment Secretary Nicholas Ridley.

'Wherever I drive in Southern England today, the place is being torn up and torn apart. The pull of Europe and the competition of the Channel Tunnel, both of which I strongly support, intensify the pressure.' Heseltine wanted a bigger push to revive the north and a ban on 'new townships' in the London green belt.

Nicholas Ridley's reply had two strands to it. First, he made it clear that he did not oppose the building of new houses in southern rural England. They were one of the rewards of the enterprise culture. 'I cannot and will not say that because I have a nice house and a good life I do not care about anyone else.' Second, he argued that by putting emphasis on redevelopment within urban areas and on the recycling of urban and rural derelict land, it would be possible to meet the demand for new houses and save the green belts.

And there, on the eve of the wind-up of Peterborough Development Corporation, the argument rested. New towns were no longer part of government policy. Thinking about how to

manage development had moved on. Peterborough's townships and parks, its public sculpture and its parkways promised, like the grand design of the Prince Regent within London, to be a shining symbol of a particular age.

**M**eanwhile the Mulherns, the first new town family, were moving on too. Eileen and Michael were proud of how their three children had turned out. Helen had left school, joined the local health authority as an accountant, and married Kevin, a computer specialist, a few weeks before the wind-up of the corporation. She was also taking accountancy exams and getting promoted. Michelle, her sister, was with John Lewis in their Queensgate store. She started as a trainee manager and in 1988 took charge of a section in china and glass. Michael, the youngest of the Mulhern children, was with that well-established Peterborough firm, Pearl Assurance.

Helen and Kevin (the latter was commuting to London) were furnishing their first home in Fletton, just across the Nene from the cathedral. The neat red brick house was in a small estate which had taken the place of some allotments and a contractor's yard. Helen spotted it in a builder's release notice in the newspaper.

'I think it was in November when we first came down here. This house was only a shell then. Just the first court of the estate was finished. And, if you can imagine it, the rest of the place was mud – as far as you could see.'

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

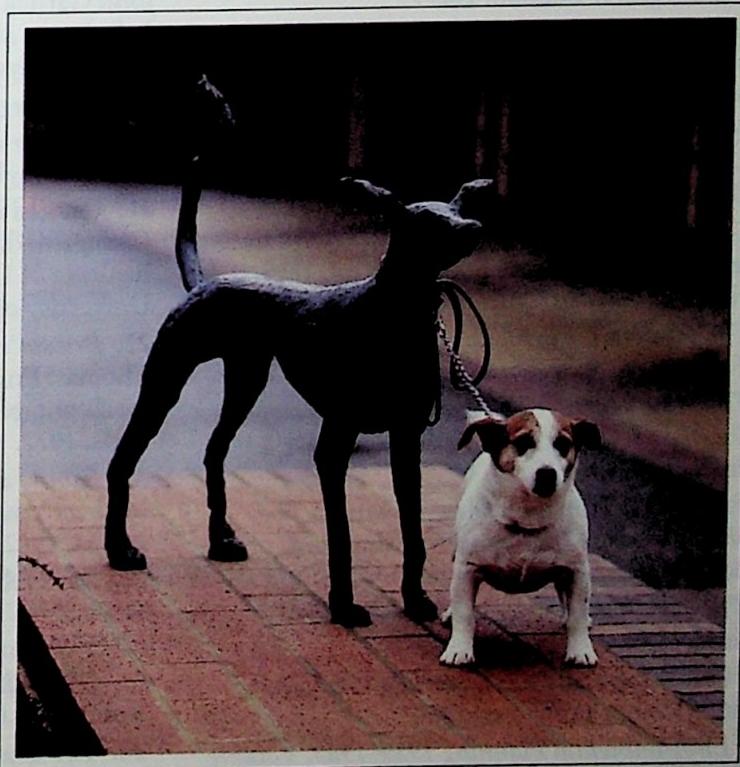
Board members and staff  
of Peterborough Development Corporation  
far too numerous to acknowledge individually  
helped me with this book.

At the risk of being invidious  
I would, nevertheless, like to pick out Ken Hutton,  
David Bath and Paul Way for special thanks.  
Without their encouragement and help this book  
would never have been written – certainly not in the  
time available.

Les Webb hunted down the vast majority  
of the pictures and, through his proof-reading,  
brought to my disordered hyphens, amongst other things, order.  
In London Bobbie Nation patiently abetted my mouldywharp  
existence.

I am grateful to them all.

London, 30th September 1988.



*Barry Flanagan's 'Opera Dog' – with friend.  
Copeland, Bretton.*

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# APPENDIX 1

## PETERBOROUGH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION: THE BOARD

### *Chairmen*

Sir Christopher Higgins	1968–1981
Jeremy Rowe CBE MA	1981–1988
(Appointed to board 1979)	

### *Deputy Chairmen*

Cyril John Dunham FRICS	1968–1973
Leslie Kemp CBE FCIArb FBIM FFB	1974–1982
Sir Franklin Braithwaite DL MA CBIM	1982–1988
(Appointed to board 1981)	

### *Members*

Sir Ivor Baker CBE MA JP	1968–1978
*Lt Col The Hon Peter Brassey JP DL	1968–1970
*Edward Collinson	1968–1972
†Harold Raymond Laxton	1968–1980
Clare Mansel OBE	1968–1972
†Charles Swift OBE	1968–1988
Professor J. R. James CB OBE BA MRTPI HonFRIBA HonLLD	1969–1980
*John Horrell CBE TD DL FRSA	1970–1988
Bernard Brook-Partridge FCIS HonFIE MBIM FRSA	1972–1988
†The Baroness Stedman of Longthorpe OBE	1972–1975
*The Baroness David of Romsey	1976–1979
*Janet Jones	1979–1983
†Jean Barker	1980–1988
Professor Gordon Cameron MA FRSA HonRICS	1981–1988
Sir John Sparrow	1981–1988
Stephen Bingham OBE MA(Hons)	1982–1988
*The Baroness Blatch of Hinchinbrooke CBE	1984–1988

### *Secretaries*

Air Commodore Randles Wardle CBE AFC	1968
Eric Norris	1968–1974
Paul Way	1974–1988

\*County Councillor

†City Councillor

## APPENDIX 2

### PETERBOROUGH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION PRINCIPAL OFFICERS

General Managers	Wyndham Thomas CBE HonMRTPI John Beckett CIPFA Ken Hutton BEng FICE FIHT	1968–1983 1983–1984 1984–1988
Director of Technical Services	Keith Maplestone DipArch FRIBA DipLA	1984–1988
Director of Marketing and Planning	David Bath BSocSc DipTP MRTPI	1984–1988
Chief Finance Officers	John Beckett CIPFA Donald MacDonald CIPFA (joined corporation 1970)	1968–1983 1983–1988
Chief Legal Officer	Neville Smallman LLB	1969–1988
Chief Estates Officer	Bob Balam ARICS ARVA	1968–1971
Chief Estates Surveyors	John Case BSc (Est Man) ARICS Nick Robson FRICS (joined corporation 1969)	1971–1984 1984–1988
Chief Architects	John Cresswell DipArch ARIBA Keith Maplestone DipArch FRIBA DipLA	1968–1972 1972–1984
Chief Engineer	Ken Hutton BEng FICE FIHT	1968–1984
Chief Planning Officers	Edwin Schoon MCD BArch ARIBA AMTPI (joined corporation 1969) David Bath BSocSc DipTP MRTPI (joined corporation 1971)	1971–1974 1974–1984
Chief Quantity Surveyor	Tony Manders FRICS	1969–1988
Social Development Officers	Robin Guthrie MA(Cantab) MSc Phil Doran MA	1969–1975 1975–1988
Housing Manager	Gerry Burns DMA FIH	1970–1988
Public Relations Officers	Clive Brown Ken McKay	1970–1977 1977–1988
Chief Administrative Officer	Paul Way (joined corporation 1971)	1980–1988
Establishment Officer	Bill Cookson CIPFA (joined corporation 1972)	1978–1988

# APPENDIX 3

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## PETERBOROUGH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION SUMMARY OF FINANCES

FINANCIAL YEAR	CAPITAL EXPENDITURE £m					INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT £m			FINANCING £m	
	Land and site development	Buildings	General development	Total	Cols 2 to 5	Surplus/ (deficit) for year before loan interest and principal repayments	Loan interest and principal repayments	Surplus/ (deficit) for year after loan charges	Proceeds from disposal of properties	Loans raised from/ (net repayments to) DoE
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
1968/69	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	1
1969/70	2	—	—	1	3	—	—	—	—	2
1970/71	3	1	1	—	5	—	—	—	—	4
1971/72	3	2	1	1	7	—	1	(1)	1	8
1972/73	3	3	2	2	10	1	2	(1)	1	8
1973/74	10	3	1	2	16	1	2	(1)	2	14
1974/75	11	8	2	1	22	2	5	(3)	2	22
1975/76	9	12	3	4	28	4	9	(5)	1	30
1976/77	9	13	3	4	29	6	13	(7)	1	34
1977/78	6	13	3	7	29	7	18	(11)	1	37
1978/79	4	9	6	4	23	10	22	(12)	2	32
1979/80	5	9	7	4	25	7	27	(20)	5	39
1980/81	3	15	9	2	29	7	32	(25)	11	47
1981/82	3	10	9	3	25	7	39	(32)	14	39
1982/83	6	5	—	5	16	9	44	(35)	6	47
1983/84	1	4	3	9	17	8	38	(30)	7	36
1984/85	2	5	1	5	13	10	32	(22)	7	32
1985/86	4	2	1	3	10	13	35	(22)	11	20
1986/87	11	2	1	1	15	318	28	290	16	(276)
1987/88	4	3	—	4	11	(47)	21	(68)	71	(29)
1988/89 (½ year)	1	—	—	1	2	14	9	5	27	(10)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>377</b>	<b>—</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>137</b>

At 30 September 1988 the Corporation's outstanding debt was £137m of which £103m was for rented houses and £34m for all other purposes.

The net assets represented by the housing debt of £103m comprised rented houses with a vacant possession market value of about £240m, or at average 'right-to-buy' prices a total value of £120m.

The other debt totalling £34m was backed by net assets comprising commercial and industrial buildings and land which could be expected to realise at least £125m.

# APPENDIX 4

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## PETERBOROUGH DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION SUMMARY OF NEW TOWN ACHIEVEMENTS

	31 March 1970 (Date building started)	30 September 1988 (Date of wind-up)
<b>Population</b>	85,920	134,920
<b>Houses built by</b>		
Development Corporation	10,332	
City Council	2,602	
Housing associations	2,358	
Private developers	<u>11,014</u>	
<b>Total</b>	<u>26,306</u>	
<b>Jobs</b>	49,308	75,800
Industrial floorspace	6.7 m sq ft	12.9 m sq ft
Office floorspace	0.8 m sq ft	2.2 m sq ft
Retail floorspace	1.8 m sq ft	2.9 m sq ft
Schools – secondary	9	11
primary	40	57
special	3	7
<b>Roads – new or improved     primary roads</b>		26.45 miles
<b>Investment – public</b>		£452 million
private		£530 million

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